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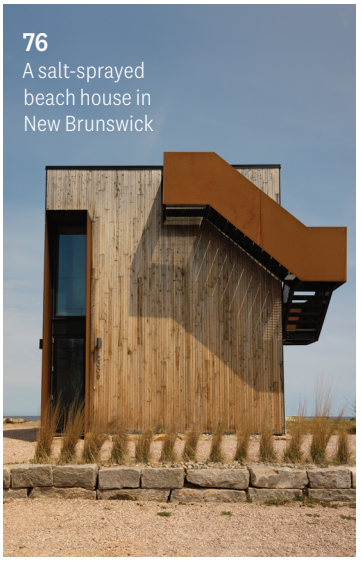


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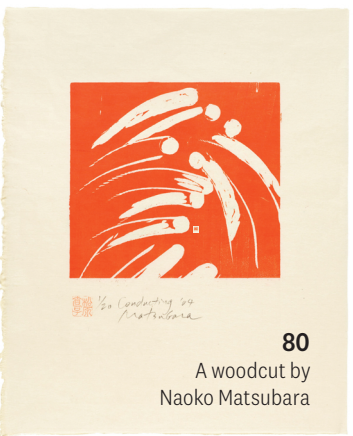
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DIGITAL COLOUR SPECIALIST Drew Maynard

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Maclean's is a member of the National Newsmedia Council, an independent organization established to uphold ethical journalistic practices. If you have concerns about editorial content, please contact us directly. If you are not satisfied with the response and wish to file a formal complaint, visit the NNC's website at mediacouncil.ca.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

IN THIS ISSUE OF MACLEAN'S

In late May, I travelled to Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, with my mother and daughter to see *Anything Goes* at the Shaw Festival. We're fans of golden-age musicals—Irving Berlin and Cole Porter and original Broadway cast recordings from the '50s and '60s. We visit Shaw every year together, a three-generation road-trip tradition.

Before the play, we ate a picnic lunch down the road from the theatre, looking across the narrow Niagara River to the shores of New York state. From where we sat, America was a short canoe trip away.

I stared across the water with fresh eyes, processing the turmoil Trump's short reign has unleashed on the world. Until this year, I viewed America as a benign neighbour, a friend. But on this trip, it looked different—foreign and hostile.

Niagara-on-the-Lake is a good place to contemplate the relationship between Canada and the U.S. Back in 1778, British Loyalist refugees crossed to the west bank of the Niagara River—pretty much the exact spot where we were picnicking—to escape the American Revolution. They set up a supply depot there and, for a short while, that region served as the capital of Upper Canada. In the War of 1812, Americans stormed the shore, occupied it for a few months, then retreated.

Now, once again, we face a threat from our neighbours to the south, and Canadians are trying to figure out what that means.



Hair and makeup by Alanna Fennell/Plutino Group

PHOTOGRAPH BY **ERIN LEYDON**

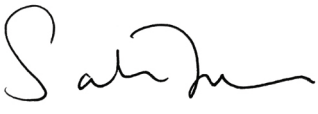
Standing on that shoreline, I felt a connection with our country's founders. Defiant and determined, they charted their own path.

Donald Trump says that the line that separates Canada and the U.S. is "artificially drawn." And in a sense he's right: our national border is a human construct, and a porous one, too. On my visit to Niagara-on-the-Lake, I saw many American licence plates belonging to people who were likely popping over the bridge for lunch or a winery tour. But our countries have different origin stories and different cultures and different values, and Trump has forced us to consider and define what those are.

"Canada and the U.S. have different cultures and values, and Trump has forced us to define what those are"

In this special themed issue, just in time for Canada Day, we explore all those questions. Stephen Maher explains how Canada's identity has always been forged in resistance to America. A selection of thinkers and industrialists propose concrete, audacious plans for Canada's future on the world stage. Jason McBride takes the temperature of another porous border town: Windsor, Ontario. We hear from a handful of plucky business owners whose lives have been upended amid tariff uncertainty. And Elizaveta Tarnarutckaia, a writer who moved from Russia to Calgary a decade ago, argues that the best way to understand Canada is through its literature.

We may not have all the answers to the question of national identity, but we hope to provide inspiration, ideas and history—a portrait of Canada in a tumultuous time.



SARAH FULFORD
Editor-in-chief, *Maclean's*

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COMMENTS

READERS WEIGH IN



Pierre's People

A growing number of millennials and Gen Zers are turning to the right in their bid for a better future. Here, five first-time voters share why they're picking Poilievre.

Sabastian Marion, 18

International economics student at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver

I'M FROM DAWSON CREEK, a rural area in northern B.C. Most people there are conservative, so that's how I picked up my values. My dad owns a small construction company, and I used to work with him over the summer. He always talked about how taxes were too high. As a business owner, the higher your taxes, the less you can pay your employees, and the less they have to spend. It's bad for the economy as a whole.

Once I got older, I experienced the impact of taxes for myself. I have less to save for my future. The cost of living in Canada is way too high. We should be one of the most prosperous countries in the world. We have so many natural resources. The Conservatives want to reduce taxes, which will make life more affordable for young people like me. Canada also needs new housing policies. I'm in my first year at UBC, where I have guaranteed accommodations on campus. But next year, I'll have to move into a shared place off-campus. I'll probably be paying around $1,300 for a room in a house with six other guys. The Conservatives are planning to increase the housing supply by incentivizing municipalities with perks to increase new housing and reduced red tape to speed up permit approvals.

Instead of raising taxes, Poilievre wants to shrink government spending. I support that: we need to make cuts to social services to get rid of our ballooning deficit. I believe in Pierre's dollar-for-dollar policy, where for every dollar of government spending, he'll find one dollar of savings. That will reduce the deficit to lower the burden for my generation.

The Conservatives also support ending safe drug supply, which I believe will help with our opioid crisis. One day, when my friends and I were walking around Vancouver, we ended up on East Hastings, which is a rough part of town. It was horrible. There were drugs and needles everywhere, and it smelled like a sewer. People were selling stolen phones and electronics, presumably to buy more drugs or food. Getting rid of safe supply will push people to get better.

I love the Conservatives' plan to cut the red tape for small businesses. I'm hoping to start a company with my friends in Vancouver after I graduate. I'm not sure what it'll be, but I'd like it to help out Canadians. Reducing obstacles will inspire entrepreneurship and innovation. One day, I want to own a home and start a family. And I believe that, under Pierre's leadership, that will finally be attainable.

"The Conservatives want to cut taxes, which will make life more affordable for young people like me"

30 MAY 2025

PHOTOGRAPH BY VISHAL MARAPON

BLUE CRUSH

In the run-up to the federal election in April, we sized up the Conservative Party. How would they reshape the country if they took power? Who was driving the bus? And why had so many young Canadians—usually a reliable source of left-wing votes—taken up with Poilievre and Co.? Some readers were amazed at the very existence of such creatures.

After reading your article about young conservatives, I was perplexed how a human rights student and daughter of immigrants who mentions always being concerned about money growing up could support a party that continually votes against initiatives that benefit low-income families and actively speaks about taking away people's rights. I would absolutely love for my children to own a home one day but not at the expense of other people's human rights. I can only imagine how those discussions go down in class.

Megan Calcott
St. Catharines, Ontario

I applaud the young people featured for their engagement in politics, which is critical to our democracy. One comment stood out to me and made me think there may be some naïveté about public services in this country. All favoured the Conservative Party for supporting lower taxes to keep more money in their own pockets. One claimed his parents, who raised him in Quebec and Alberta, learned that "by working hard, and without much help from the state, they could make a good life." Does he consider the services they received from the public health and public education systems over the years to be insignificant "help from the state"?

Lana Durst
Scarborough, Ontario

The youth are split in their votes and, for the first time in a long time, young people aren't overwhelmingly choosing Liberals. Certain people can't comprehend that youth can have their own opinions, and they rely on "foreign interference" and "the rise of far-right radicalism on the internet" as explanations, instead of, you know, how expensive and difficult life has gotten lately.

ApricotMigraine, Reddit

As a relatively young person myself, I've seen many peers shift from left to right. Trudeau took office in 2015. If you were born after 2000, you were between eight and 15 years old at that point. For this age group, 10 years of Trudeau was the first real political exposure they got. And over the past 10 years, things have been bad for young people. Fewer jobs and more expensive homes. So they see that and think, "Liberals for 10 years, things got worse. Time for a change!"

Bodanski, Reddit

All of their points are extremely valid. I don't necessarily agree in every scenario, but how can you possibly blame young people for feeling this way after watching the failures of a government that's been in power the whole time they've been able to comprehend what's been going on?

I also wonder if the younger generation just aren't as bothered by smug, arrogant know-it-alls like Poilievre.

Browne888, Reddit

The Liberals have alienated young people on issues like immigration and housing over the past few years. It shouldn't be surprising that they've grown to distrust a party that's repeatedly shown they prioritize boomers and retirees (who I guess are more reliable voters).

Other than legalizing weed, I can't think of a ton of Liberal policies that were popular among young Canadians. When you make Canadians feel left behind and ignored, you can't be surprised when they pivot to the alternative.

TheMongoose, Reddit

FEEL THE BYRNE

The May issue also featured a profile of Jenni Byrne, Poilievre's spiky campaign manager (and former girlfriend), who's spent the past decade shaping Canadian conservatism from behind the scenes.

Really interesting read. I was struck by how Byrne and Poilievre, these strident, committed, lifelong politicians, don't really seem animated by anything other than "winning."

I'm sure that's too reductionist, and I guess Poilievre's a lifelong free-market, trickle-down-economics guy. But does anyone actually get the feeling they believe these tactics and this behaviour are for the good of their communities, or humanity?

CaptainCanusa, Reddit

"Byrne's greatest political talent is her ability to take the temperature of the party base and to reflect voters' grievances back at them in a way that makes them feel heard."

This is exactly the problem I have with politics today—it's all focused around making people feel their grievances are heard, but nothing in that tells me whether they're able to find the right solution to these grievances, or actually implement that solution. And in this campaign, nothing the Conservatives have done is making me feel confident they have people on their team who can competently execute.

Ether_Reddit, Reddit

Great article. The "re-alignment" Byrne seeks toward right-wing grievance politics would be disastrous for our political culture and the country in general. Though that's the inherent flaw in all this, isn't it? This tactic appeals to a certain id, a feeling like the system's out to get you and the only way to fix it is to tear it all down. That can be effective when people are mad (see the polls just a couple of months ago), but it fails to capture any other feeling and, maybe more importantly, it fails to build anything lasting. Harper won a majority in 2011, but four years later Trudeau's Liberals won a majority and governed for 10 years. A few months ago the Conservatives had a 25-point lead, and it evaporated into nothing. This tendency toward short-sighted destruction is both the danger of this kind of politics and also its Achilles heel.

Another interesting thing is how Poilievre's right-wing populism developed in Canada. To the untrained eye it looks like he's merely aping Trump's successful rhetoric, but this really goes back to the Reform Party, which was founded in 1987, and arguably further back to Western discontent with the Progressive Conservatives, and earlier populist movements like the Social Credit Party. It's interesting to see the parallel development in Canadian and American politics. People often think of Canada as America Jr., simply following in its footsteps, but I think the two countries are better thought of as parallel experiments in democracy, with a fair amount of crosstalk.

BustyMicologist, Reddit

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FINANCIAL COOPERATION:

How a Century-Old Model Is More Relevant than Ever

As Desjardins marks 125 years, president and CEO Guy Cormier reflects on the credit union's origins, its impact for Canadians and why the co-operative model remains powerful in today's economy



Guy Cormier at the 2025 Desjardins Group Annual General Meeting

As Canada looks inward to re-assert national values in the face of global uncertainty, few institutions feel more homegrown—or more enduring—than Desjardins. This year, the financial co-operative celebrates its 125th anniversary, marking over a century of influence on the country's financial landscape through a model rooted in trust, equity and community.

"For us, social impact isn't an option, it's a responsibility," says Guy Cormier, president and CEO of Desjardins Group. "It's a deeply rooted belief that has been in our DNA for 125 years." Desjardins began in Lévis, Quebec, in 1900, founded by Alphonse Desjardins and his wife, Dorimène.

The idea for North America's first credit union was sparked after Alphonse, a stenographer in the House of Commons, heard a parliamentary debate about rampant loan-sharking. One story about a Montreal man who had been sentenced to pay $5,000 in interest on a $150 loan was particularly shocking. In response to what he saw as a clear injustice, Alphonse set out to create a new kind of financial institution in Canada—one that gave ordinary people fair access to credit, encouraged savings and re-invested in their communities. "They firmly believed the strength of collective action could transform lives and build a more just society," says Cormier.

That vision gave rise to one of the world's most successful co-operative movements. In the early days, Alphonse Desjardins travelled over 62,000 kilometres across Quebec, Ontario and the U.S. to set the credit union model in motion. Today, Desjardins is the largest financial cooperative in North America, managing over $460 billion in assets.



Alphonse and Dorimène Desjardins, with their daughter Albertine, on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, circa 1915 (Credit: Desjardins Group Archives)

While its reach has grown dramatically, the cooperative spirit remains its core. "We prioritize purpose along with profits. There should be no contradiction between business success and collective ownership," says Cormier. "On the contrary, it is because Desjardins is profitable and generates surpluses that it can play a role as a socio-economic leader."

That leadership has meant adapting to new realities—from digital banking to climate change. "In recent years, we have undertaken a major digital shift," Cormier explains, pointing to innovations like Alvie, the brand's mobile virtual assistant. "The organization has evolved to meet the needs of the modern consumer, while staying true to its roots."

In an era when younger Canadians are seeking out values-aligned businesses, there's been an uptick in interest in the co-operative model. "Consumers, especially youth, are increasingly sensitive about the companies they do business with," Cormier says. "That plays a role in their choices as consumers." Desjardins has doubled down on its values by launching the Together for Our Youth program, which invests $50 million annually in initiatives that help young people achieve their goals.

Cormier's own journey with the organization has echoed that mission. He started as a bank teller in 1992 and now leads a company with more than 7.8 million members and clients across the country. "My entire professional life is based on the idea that co-operatives deliver a net positive, not only to their members, but to society as a whole. Despite the collective challenges we face, we still have the power to do the right thing—and to protect the common good."

Looking ahead, Cormier sees Desjardins playing a vital role in shaping a more inclusive and sustainable economy. "To have a positive impact, we need to take action," he says, citing priorities that include investments in renewable energy and affordable housing, and a focus on gender parity in the industry. "Healthy communities are directly connected to the long-term success of the businesses they support."

If Alphonse Desjardins could see the organization today, Cormier believes he'd be proud. "Our co-operative nature reflects our history. It guides our present. And it shapes our future."



Diana Matheson, Olympic soccer star and Northern Super League founder, is giving Canadian women a pro league of their own

INTERVIEW BY **KATIE UNDERWOOD** • PHOTOGRAPHY BY **VANESSA HEINS**



BACK WHEN DIANA MATHESON was a star midfielder for Canada's national women's soccer team, plays were analyzed using magnets on tactical boards. But in 2022, a year into her retirement, she found herself mapping out the country's first pro women's league on a bar napkin in Toronto's west end with Thomas Gilbert, her partner at Project 8 Sports—the company they founded to bring the idea to life. It would be her biggest win yet, even bigger than her stealthy bronze-clinching kick at the 2012 Summer Olympics in London.

The Northern Super League launched this spring, with franchises in six cities—including Montreal, Vancouver and Halifax—and ambitions for many more. Overdue? Maybe. Or maybe perfectly timed: thanks to the Professional Women's Hockey League and, soon, Toronto's own WNBA team, women's sports are popping all the way off in Canada. Still in its infancy, the NSL has already drawn sponsors like Coca-Cola, team owners like Matheson's former teammate Christine Sinclair—"Sinc" to her—and investors like track hotshot Andre De Grasse. Forget exporting our female soccer greats to the States; we're cheering for the home teams now. I spoke with Matheson days after she did just that, celebratory mimosa in hand, at the Montreal Roses' first-ever home opener.

Take me back to the moment you stepped onto the field at BC Place for the Vancouver Rise match back in April—which just so happened to be the first-ever game of Canada's first-ever women's pro soccer league.

The day before, one of the Calgary players said it was like we were planning for our wedding. *It goes by quickly, try to enjoy it, you're not going to be able to talk to everyone*—it was all of those things. During the pre-game celebration, Christine Sinclair and I were on the field. The most emotional I got was when they introduced me. I finished the game in the stands with some of our league partners, and we all felt a bit dissociated, like we were at a badass pro sports event but not *our* badass pro sports event.

Was it as good a feeling or better than your bronze-winning goal at London 2012?

London was surreal, joyful—all of that. This felt magnitudes bigger.

Of the 32 countries that competed in the last Women's World Cup, only two didn't have their own domestic pro leagues: Haiti and Canada. When did you think, *If our league is ever going to get off the ground, I'm gonna have to do it?*

The talk in Canada was always, "We're going to start in two years, we're going to start in two years." We'd been having those conversations since 2007, so it didn't seem like it was going to happen. This journey started for me when I was about 37. I'd always been interested in the business side of soccer, so my first step after retirement was to go get a few letters at the end of my name so I could be taken more seriously. The COC has a program called Game Plan that gave me a $100,000 scholarship to the MBA program at Queen's Smith School of Business. I also got a scholarship to do a

"Canada's number-one team sport by participation right now isn't hockey; it's soccer. It's also the most popular sport among new Canadians. FIFA 2026 is only going to add jet fuel to it all."

two-year transition program for players—an overview of the business of football. For 18 months, I was just a full-time student.

At what point did your "thesis" become the Northern Super League?
I did two major projects in those programs, and both related to the feasibility of women's pro soccer. I learned that a lot of the women's leagues around the world exist because of investment from the men's side—either a federation builds a league or a men's league chooses (or is mandated) to have one. Building ours independently meant we'd get to make decisions for ourselves, but there was no way I was going to take on something that big alone. I'm a team athlete at heart. I met Thomas Gilbert, my business partner, through our MBA program. We just thought, *We've got to do it.* There would've been too much regret if we missed the boat.

When you finally did go public with the branding, you landed on "Northern Super League." It's a hell of a name, but it's a bit funny that Canada's first women's pro team makes no mention of Canada or women. Was that on purpose?
It was. The NSL is in two buckets: one is North American pro sport, where leagues just say what they are on the tin (like the National Hockey League or Major League Baseball). Whereas in soccer leagues around the world, names are some iteration of "best league," "premier league"—

Or, if you're Spain's LaLiga, just "the league."
Yeah. The second bucket is women's sport, which is evolving from a time where you always had to say "women's" as a qualifier. By default, it was men's. It also felt more inclusive not to gender the name either way. We don't even say soccer, because then you get into "Is it soccer or football?"

Oh, god. Don't start on that.
This name still feels Canadian and it still feels elite.

And super.
Which is super!

As a player, you probably thought about all the things you'd change if you ran the show. Were there any fixes that were harder than expected once you finally had some sway?
I was definitely one of the players that was like, "Oh, *why* can't our schedule ever come out sooner?" Now I know it's because Canada doesn't have enough soccer venues. Denmark, Sweden and Australia—comparable countries to us—all have one mid-sized soccer stadium, which fits 8,000 to 18,000 fans, for every half-million people. In Canada, we have one for every eight million people. When the NSL goes to make a schedule, we're the second or third league in line to choose dates. It was a challenge for us even to have our teams play each other an equal number of times. That's how low the bar is.

To echo a point you once made: they sell pucks on Parliament Hill, not soccer balls. How hard do you think it'll be for you to turn more Canadians on to soccer—or is the appetite already there?
In the grand scheme of things, Canada's pretty new to the sport. In other countries, it's been the most popular one for, like, 100 years. Here, soccer used to be a punchline: "Real men play *American* football!" The feeling now is that it's only going to get bigger. The number-one team sport by participation isn't hockey; it's soccer, and it's been that way for a few years. It's also the most popular sport among new Canadians. We've got FIFA 2026 coming, too, which is only going to add jet fuel to it all.

Are you expecting a bump from the simultaneous growth of the Professional Women's Hockey League and, pretty soon, Tempo basketball in Toronto?
Absolutely. A rising tide raises all boats. The "P-dub" being in market before us was a huge help, because we had more data we could bring to the table. That's been one of the real challenges in women's sport. The bias has been to say, "It doesn't make money" and "No one watches it." There were no numbers to disprove that until Canadian Women and Sport started their reporting and the PWHL launched. Then, Canadians (and any disbelievers) could see the excitement on their TVs, like, *Oh, this is what you mean*.

Vanessa Gilles, a Canadian who played for Angel City in L.A., said she won't return to the States because of geopolitical tensions. Maybe this is cynical, but does any part of you see America's chaos as a recruitment opportunity?
Canada already has a strong case for recruiting players—stable contracts, a high standard of living. The most optimistic part of all this is the surge of Canadian pride. It's at the highest levels we've seen in our lives. We're having conversations about how to nation-build in this country that we haven't had before. Hopefully, those help build what we're doing. We've got teams in six Canadian cities. Those are your domestic vacations right there, Canada!

About two weeks before the league kicked off, you posted a picture of yourself as a kid sporting your jersey—and an absolutely amazing mullet, by the way.
It was solid, yep. Solid.

Were you ever a "Timbit?" Tim Hortons sponsored a truly unbelievable number of kids' sports leagues in the '90s.

"We've got six teams in six Canadian cities. Those are your domestic vacations right there, Canada!"

I don't know if we would have been branded "Timbits" at that time. My first team was Oakville Hydro or something.

When did you realize that you were good—and that you loved soccer enough to make it your whole life?
My first view of women's soccer was at the '99 World Cup, when Brandi Chastain ripped off her jersey. I didn't have aspirations to play pro; I wasn't even aware that was an option. And I was pretty good, but I didn't think I was anything exceptional. I didn't make the provincial team the first time I tried out, and I only made the national team when I was in my last year of high school. That's when I started dreaming of World Cups and Olympics. I went where the game took me, but I didn't imagine all of this as a little kid.

Tanya Boychuk, a forward for the Montreal Roses, has said that, when she played in Sweden, she lived in a town of 2,000 people and became kind of a local celebrity. People brought muffins to her door. Did you have a similar experience when you played pro for Team Strømmen in Norway?
Yes and no. The fans knew who the internationals were—a couple Canadians and a couple Americans. That following wasn't big, though. The crowds at the time were a couple hundred people. (Not large, no muffins.) There are multiple women's divisions in European football, and while the pro side wasn't driving millions of dollars, it had strong club loyalty. It was do or die. We were fighting for silverware every year, and it meant a lot to everyone. That was my first taste of being a pro, because obviously you didn't get to see that at all in women's sport in Canada back then.

Was it also your first taste of living overseas?
Yeah, and it was great. When you travel with the national team, you barely get to see anything, but when you're somewhere for 10 months a year—like I was in Oslo—you get days off and a summer break. The west coast of Norway is unbelievable. It's like a fairy tale where the fjords are.

Christine Sinclair is a co-owner of the Vancouver Rise. Another Super player said she came out of retirement to play in this league—and for you. The consensus seems to be: you don't say no to Diana. Do you have insane negotiation skills or what?
I don't think it's about me. We came out of a national team program, especially from 2012 onward, where the goal was to leave the game better than we found it. That was actually our rallying cry back in London.

Do you think some of their involvement has to do with the feeling of "once a team, always a team?" Like you're invisibly joined at the hip for life?
I think it's about what it means for these women to play here, some after 18 years away. Financially, too—the opportunity to build their brand and a life in Canada is new. I was actually joking that this league is all a secret plan to hang out with my friends. So far, so good.

How much soccer are you playing now? You retired in 2021, but the sport is in your sinew at this point.
I pretty much… don't play, and I don't miss it *too* much. I've had seven surgeries. The body's a bit worse for wear. So I'm good. My workouts these days are yoga, maybe a bit of a jog and lots more walking. I'd love to join a women's hockey team in Toronto, though. I've been saying that for years.

Are there any sports you just can't hack?
Basketball. I'm five feet tall, so maybe that wasn't a good fit for me. I'm usually up to try something new. This past winter, my wife, Anastasia, and I were trying to get outside more, so we went to the public rinks in Toronto. She took up figure skating and tried to teach me some speed skating, which she used to do professionally.

I can only imagine what game night is like at your house.
Anastasia's not into board games per se, but with lawn games and those sorts of things, we're pretty easygoing. That's one of the things that brought us together: we don't get competitive over smaller things.

Have any habits from your past life as a pro athlete bled into your business life?
Just yesterday, we were with Steph Labbé and her wife, Georgia Simmerling—both former Olympians. The four of us chatted about foods we can't go anywhere near because we ate them too much as athletes. Georgia's was granola bars. The only thing I really didn't like was getting up to travel to games. I'm not a morning person, so now, on early flights, my brain goes back there.

I gather you're not going to hit every single game, but think of the Aeroplan points! How many *do* you plan to see in person?
I've been to all the home openers, and I'll try to make it back to each market at least one or two more times. I haven't seen a game at Swangard Stadium in Burnaby yet, so I definitely want to get out there.

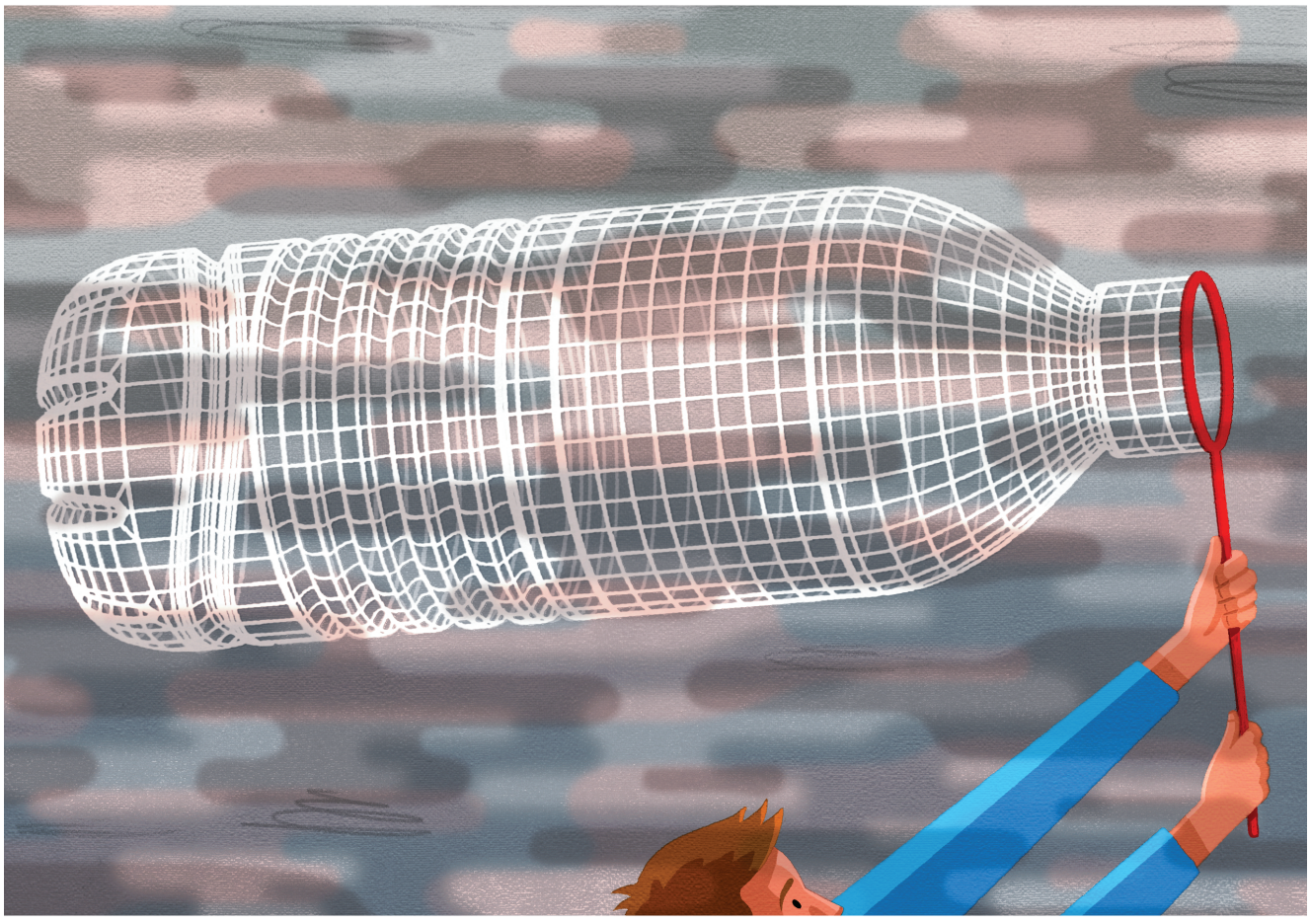
Obviously you can't pick a favourite team, but you live in Toronto. Is it just—
No. I'll probably be at the most Toronto games this year because of the travel budget, but the teams are like children: you can't pick one. I love them all. ■

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

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Harvest Water From Fog

Canada's fresh-water supply has been drained by drought and dwindling aquifers. To find more, just look up. ***By Tatiana Estevez***

AFTER I GRADUATED from the University of Ottawa with my B.A. in business administration in 2015, I went on a backpacking trip around California. It turned out that my holiday coincided with the worst drought in the state's history. Signs of the crisis were everywhere—lawns browned and burned, lakebeds dried up into cracked mudflats. The governor's office lowered water usage limits by 25 per cent to protect the state's supply, infuriating wealthy homeowners and golfers. I saw news reports about financially overleveraged farmers dying by suicide as their crops withered. And yet, when I got to San Francisco, I couldn't see across the bay for all the fog. That was my eureka moment: the sky was full of water. Why couldn't we use it to fight what was happening on the ground?

Signs of Canada's own draining water supply are all around us: worsening wildfires, prairie-wide droughts, stranded salmon and surging insurance premiums for farmers. Yet, to most Canadians, the liquid coming from our kitchen taps feels like an unlimited resource. Nearly nine million of us rely exclusively on the fresh water stored in underground aquifers, including everyone in P.E.I. The problem is that, globally, we're now drawing water out of our aquifers much faster than they can be naturally replenished by rainfall. At the same time, we're ignoring the abundant water hovering above us. Canada's West Coast has the same fog that caught my attention in San Francisco; out east, clouds bursting with desalinated water roll in off the Atlantic. Man-made

ILLUSTRATION BY **PETE RYAN**

desalination plants are energy-intensive and expensive, so it's cheaper and safer to let the clouds do the desalinating for us. It's just a matter of getting that water to ground level.

Within a year of my California trip, I founded Permalution, a cleantech company that converts fog into fresh, usable water. Most of my family members are engineers, so they pitched in with the science; meanwhile, I retreated to my garage to cobble together hardware-store supplies into Permalution's first fog-collecting prototype. Our current models are much more advanced: big polypropylene membranes that vaguely resemble tennis nets strung up on metal frames designed to bio-mimic the way tall conifer trees collect fog. In nature, it condenses into ever-larger water droplets on trees' needles until gravity pulls them to earth. Unfortunately, since 2000, Canada has lost about 14 per cent of its conifer cover to logging and disease, causing a so-called "firmageddon" along the West Coast. Our collectors fill the gap.

Our team installs the units on islands and mountaintops and along coastlines—places where fog naturally passes through. Like the conifers, the collectors' mesh condenses the fog into usable water, then gravity pulls the droplets down the membrane into a cistern, filter or irrigation system. A single unit with a 20-square-metre mesh network can gather up to 400 litres of water a day, while our industrial-sized units can get up to 2,000 litres a day. (For reference, the average Canadian uses just under 230 litres a day.) Our collectors can also run totally off-grid, making them ideal for remote applications. And in areas with solar panels and cell service, we can instantly upload collection data via meteorological sensors to the cloud—the digital kind.

We've also created a Fog Atlas that uses mapping algorithms to find fog hotspots across the country, like the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. But even in drier, landlocked areas, like Jasper, fog collection provides an easy water source. (The elevation of the Rockies gives our machines access to cloud water that otherwise wouldn't rain down.) We place radar sensors in those areas to measure the water quality, the number of litres we can accumulate per day and the ideal positioning for our units.

Fog collection is a great tool for wildfire prevention in the country's dry interior. Our off-grid collectors have fireproof membranes that can gather water for irrigation in high-risk areas or that can be stored in man-made reservoirs for later use. We've already successfully tested these techniques in Nayarit, Mexico, in an area of forest frequently devastated by fire. In 2019, Permalution partnered with the local government and secretary of sustainable development, first installing sensors to find the fog, then outfitting collectors in remote mountainous areas to gather and disperse water.

Though some progress has been made in the last 10 years, many Indigenous people across Canada are still living under boil-water advisories. Fog collection is one low-cost solution for reserves that don't have access to fresh drinking water because of drought or contamination. During the pandemic, Permalution consulted with First Nations communities in Canada and Latin America—not only to create more abundant household-water sources, but also as a way to develop new economic opportunities. (For example, First Nations could use fog water sourced from their land to manufacture new food, beverage and cosmetic products.)

"We're draining our aquifers much faster than they can be replenished by rain. At the same time, we're ignoring the abundant water hovering above us."

In the private sector, fog collection can support plenty of water-reliant industries. Currently, many Canadian mining operations have to truck in water for ore processing and cooling machinery if their dig sites don't have access to a natural water source nearby. In the long run, fog collection is cheaper than the trucks; after the initial investment of buying the collectors ($40,000 to start), they require minimal maintenance. It's also safer than drilling for groundwater, which risks contaminating aquifers and causing land subsidence—when the ground around wells begins to sink as they're drained.

Fog collection could also reduce the strain on community water reserves. Data centres—which store the computing devices used to power AI tools—are notoriously thirsty, and the artificial intelligence boom is only increasing that demand. In Virginia, the data-centre capital of the world, water usage increased from 1.13 billion gallons to 1.85 billion gallons between 2019 and 2023. Our fog collectors could process some of the steam these centres generate, gathering water that could be sent right back into the local supply. As another example, fog collectors could be quite helpful for breweries. We consulted with one company who told us that, depending on the brewing process, a litre of beer sometimes requires a litre of water to make, so reliable access is a key component of their business model. And who wouldn't want to try a fog lager?

The number of future applications for fog collection is huge. Right now, our team is working with the University of Toronto on a hybrid collector with solar panels—to catch water when it's cloudy and rays when it's sunny. We're finding ways to pair our machines with cloud-seeding technology, where planes and ground generators encourage precipitation by dropping and shooting silver iodide into the sky. My ultimate dream is for our collectors to provide water to five million people within the next five years—many of them in Canada. We need to take better advantage of the liquid gold trapped in our vast northern sky. ■

TATIANA ESTEVEZ *is the founder and CEO of Permalution, a cleantech firm based in Montreal.*



My Weekend at Sad Camp

After my mother's death, I signed up for a grief retreat in the forests of California. It upended everything I knew about mourning—and healing. ***By Maïté Snauwaert***

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **AMBER BRACKEN**

FOR MOST OF MY ADULT LIFE, my mother and I were estranged. She was difficult, prone to anger and often declined to answer the phone for weeks or months at a time. Twenty years ago, when I offered to introduce her to my husband, she replied with a one-word email: "NO." The last time I saw her was in May of 2022. My sister and I—she in Paris, me travelling in Berlin—had spent a week trying to reach our mother. Finally, we hopped on a train to the small town in France where she lived to make sure she was okay. The visit was tense and suffocating, as if the confinement of the pandemic had made her home smaller, or me into a giant.

When my mother died the following year, I felt both angry and numb. There would be no holding hands, no final peace. Thankfully, my siblings and I had each other. The four of us gathered to deal with the funeral and the house, since our mother had left no instructions. When I returned home to Edmonton, I threw myself into work, my usual coping mechanism. I'm a professor of literature at the University of Alberta, and I made myself busier than ever, even as I complained that I wasn't able to pause and grieve. In truth, I didn't know how to fit the enormity of the loss into the normal frame of reality. Ironically, my research involves examining grief: I was about to publish a new book about mourning memoirs. Still, I felt poorly equipped to deal with loss firsthand. My mother and I had spent years with almost no contact—but she was still a number I could reach. Now her absence was complete. In this new loneliness, I just wanted someone to make me soup.

In June of 2023, I received a newsletter advertising a "conscious grieving retreat," to be held that September in a small town in Northern California called Mill Valley. It felt fated: my husband and I had vacationed in the very same town the previous summer and, along with programming details, the newsletter included a testimonial from another Albertan. It would be a four-day reprieve that was also relevant to my work, a chance to get an up-close look at the burgeoning end-of-life industry. It would also give me a chance to grieve. The price for all that revelation was steep, though—the retreat cost US$2,400. (My faculty paid my fee, for professional development.)

Northern California's culture of health and wellness, alongside the entrepreneurial influence of Silicon Valley, has made it a hub for the growing grief industry: a loose constellation of startups, entrepreneurs, therapists and artists aiming to grapple with death in ways that are more productive (and more profitable). Its offerings run from the prosaic (coaching, legal advice) to the mystical (experimental medicines, curated rituals). I was introduced to this niche in 2018 at a festival called Reimagine End of Life, hosted by a Bay Area design firm called Ideo. Its chief creative officer, Paul Bennett, had lost his father years before, which got him thinking about the looming wave of mortality among baby boomers and their parents, as well as how the end-of-life industry was poised to grow.

Grief camps for youth are relatively common. Camp Erin has locations in Ontario and the U.S.; Nova Scotia has Brigadoon Village; and in British Columbia, there is Camp Kerry, which was so overbooked last year it turned away as many kids as it accepted. The California retreat, however, was different, designed for adults by Claire Bidwell Smith, a therapist who has become a major figure in the new business of mourning. When she was 14 years old, both of her parents were diagnosed with cancer—her mother died when she was 18, her father when she was 25. She has since authored books, hosted podcasts, given lectures and posted about grief to her roughly 36,000 Instagram followers.

Bidwell Smith believes that the way our society manages grief is fundamentally broken. In the West, most of us either mourn alone, strictly with those closest to us or not at all, burying our uncomfortable feelings. We treat grief as private and taboo and respond to it with silence—which Bidwell Smith would say is the opposite of what we need. Death is a massive life upheaval that completely reorganizes our reality. It requires not silence, but witnessing. That's what the Mill Valley retreat was all about.

Upon landing at San Francisco International Airport, I met up with two fellow participants to share the 50-minute cab ride to the venue, Ralston White Retreat. One of them was the most upbeat bereaved person I've ever met—she instantly coined our destination "Sad Camp." The other was the only man in attendance. As we entered the facility, up a hill among the redwoods, the afternoon was all calming, California golden light slanted across the spacious rooms. At check-in, however, everyone was tense and unsure: averted eyes, scared faces, cold smiles, people who seemed to have shrivelled on the way there, suddenly uncertain that this was a good idea. Some made secret pledges to leave if it got too hard.

There was a famous athlete and a stay-at-home mom, a lawyer and a nurse, a writer and a clinical counsellor. A TV journalist whose loss dated back 25 years was there to understand "the long arc of grief." Every kind of loss was represented: mothers, fathers, siblings, spouses, friends, young children and adult children. Some had died suddenly or ambiguously, by suicide, murder, illness or drowning. Some last year and some decades ago. Most participants were middle-aged women, though a few were younger. It was easy to spot the grieving mothers, their eyes swollen even after years. Guilt had become part of their motherhood, though they were no less mothers than before—fiercer even, having carried their children through death.

That evening, at the first sharing circle, Bidwell Smith—the retreat's lead facilitator—asked us for one word to describe how we felt. "Anxious" was the most frequent, but also "nervous" and "angry." I said "oppressed," as if grief was another demand I couldn't fit into my schedule. Hearing others' stories was a lot to take in, but by

"Death is a massive life upheaval that completely reorganizes our reality. It requires not silence, but witnessing. That's what the Mill Valley retreat was all about."



GOOD GRIEF Snauwaert believes the Mill Valley retreat—which she likens to "AA for the bereaved"—could be a healthier, more humane model of grieving for westerners going forward

the second circle the next morning, the general sentiment had shifted: this was harder than we thought, but easier than what we'd been going through alone.

From there, the rhythm was set: large gatherings alternating with smaller group sessions, on mother, father, spouse and child loss, respectively. There were writing sessions with prompts about grief and suggestions for rituals to memorialize our people. There were movement-oriented sessions, including tapping (a somatic technique to reduce anxiety) and Saturday morning yoga. During one session, the instructor asked us to locate our grief within our body, which immediately produced long, deep, cathartic tears from me—a reminder that loss is felt physically. All the workshops were punctuated by generous meals. Each day, I went for early-morning walks in the forest, where, surrounded by the enormous redwood branches, it was easy to feel a spiritual connection to something greater than myself—and to my mother.

Yet the real luxury was not in the beautiful decor, the scenery, the comforts of the house or the food. What made the retreat truly valuable was the acceptance. I hadn't expected that my main teachers would be 25 strangers, arriving with their own heart-wrenching experiences. They were a lively, generous, articulate bunch who got it, because they were going through the same thing. It was like AA for the bereaved, and I understood the power of the group. Through their compounding losses, the shared stories demonstrated that grief is not an extreme event, but a net that catches everything already fragile in your life.

On our last evening, we shared pictures of our lost ones. I showed everyone the photo my family chose for my mother's tombstone, one of the few in which she looks radiant. My mother was unpredictable, but she could also be warm and mischievous and, at times, she defended us fiercely against the world. I told a story about how she covered for me with my best friend's mom when the two of us wanted to go out dancing on Saturday nights. Everybody laughed.

The evening was secular, but a solemn peace came down with the evening. I felt shame at not having been present for my mother's death. Yet the group met me with compassion when I told my story, not judgment. My grief wasn't mirrored—so unique is each loss—but it was reciprocated.

Before going to the retreat, I had thought grief was about time. After, I understood that it's about space. Those four days created room to share, to let the air flow in. You don't move past grief, but through it. It starts with a physical space, then becomes a space you carry within yourself. It was one we all brought home.

As baby boomers age and Canada's mortality rate rises, I believe there's a chance for the ideas incubated in these kinds of exclusive spaces to be rolled out more broadly. Founded in the spring of 2020, at the height of the pandemic, the Canadian Grief Alliance—a coalition of more than 150 national and provincial associations—has called for a "national grief strategy" to address what it sees as the next global health emergency. It anticipated the wave of deaths during COVID-19, how feelings of loss would be made more complex by social distancing and being deprived of grieving rituals. The strategy has now received $1 million in federal funding, which makes me hopeful that a change is afoot in how we grapple with grief, and that the kind of communal care envisioned by professionals like Bidwell Smith may grow more prevalent.

More than a year after the retreat, some friendships forged there have remained steadfast: for a while, we had monthly check-ins on Zoom; now, we email and text. However untimely and enduring our losses—and however ill-prepared we may have been—we don't have to face them alone. ■



A SPECIAL INTEREST SECTION BY MEDIAPLANET

Canada's Life Sciences

GOING UPSTREAM:
A Call for Chronic Disease Action in Ontario

Ontario's chronic disease crisis is escalating. Real progress requires shifting from reactive care to proactive health management.

Life Sciences Ontario

Ontario faces a growing health crisis as chronic conditions are estimated to affect over three million adults in Ontario by 2040, a 72 per cent increase from 2020.

Our current healthcare system, created decades ago and built to treat immediate medical issues, struggles with long-term health management.

Chronic diseases are one of the leading causes of death and disability in Ontario and strains our already stretched healthcare system. Additionally, related health challenges create a ripple effect, with one condition often triggering the other.

> **Chronic diseases are one of the leading causes of death and disability in Ontario and strains our already stretched healthcare system.**

Despite Motion 45 in 2023 — a recommendation to develop a Chronic Disease Strategy, starting with diabetes — implementation has stalled.

Ontario can begin to shift its focus from reacting to chronic diseases toward preventing, mitigating, and managing them. They can do this by prevention through public education, expanding pharmacy-based screening, embracing digital health, and increasing treatment access for patients with long-term health conditions.

Real progress requires shifting from reactive care to proactive health management. This can transform our healthcare system to meet today's challenges while improving quality of life for millions.

Read more about Life Sciences Ontario's vision paper on Chronic Disease Strategy:

This article was **supported by Life Sciences Ontario**.

Improving Healthcare Access in Rural and Remote Canada

Canadian Association for Rural and Remote Nursing (CARRN) shares insights on the urgent healthcare needs Canada's rural and remote communities.

Looking ahead, what are the most important next steps to improve healthcare delivery and outcomes in rural and remote communities?

Improving healthcare delivery and outcomes in rural and remote communities requires long-term, community-based strategies. Key steps include expanding access to safe and affordable housing, creating protected time-off structures to reduce burnout, and increasing educational pathways for students and internationally trained professionals who want to practice in rural settings. Rural and remote perspectives must be embedded in health policy, regulation, and planning at every level.

Infrastructure investments —particularly in virtual care technology — are also critical to improving access and continuity of care. Just as importantly, health systems must reflect the lived realities of rural communities, prioritizing culturally safe, equitable, and sustainable approaches.

CARRN is helping lead this change by using its national platform to connect rural and remote nurses across Canada, amplify their experiences, and advocate for policy grounded in place-based knowledge. Through storytelling, research, and collaboration, rural nurses are shaping a more inclusive and community-rooted healthcare future.

Read the full Q&A on **healthinsight.ca**.

Publishers: **Anna Sibiga, Meredith Burt, Jessica Golyatov** Content Strategy Manager: **Nicole Kansakar** Country Manager: **Nina Theodorlis** Production & Delivery Manager: **Michael Taylor** Creative Director: **Kylie Armishaw** Digital Designer: **Miranda Robinson** Digital Media Manager: **Karm Rathod** All images are from Getty Images unless otherwise credited. This section was created by Mediaplanet and did not involve Maclean's Magazine or its editorial departments. Send all inquiries to **ca.editorial@mediaplanet.com**.

MADE IN CANADA:

How Life Sciences Can Fuel Our Economic Future

With the right support, life sciences could be Canada's next boom.

Bettina Hamelin



In 2014, West Africa was gripped by the deadliest Ebola outbreak in history. But during devastation, a ray of hope arrived: a vaccine developed at Canada's National Microbiology Laboratory was deployed to Guinea. Thousands received it — and not one vaccinated person fell ill. That vaccine, now licensed by Merck, has been approved for global use.

This wasn't an isolated success. From the discovery of insulin in 1921, to foundational HIV treatments in the 1980s, to the lipid nanoparticle behind mRNA COVID-19 vaccines and the basic discovery of artificial intelligence, Canada has quietly delivered world-changing breakthroughs.

Today, as Canada reconsiders our economic future and global trade strategies, it's time to bring life sciences to the forefront — not just as a public health priority, but as an economic engine for national prosperity.

And this engine needs to fire on all cylinders now!

Why invest now?

While the U.S. has long been the epicenter of medical innovation, proposed cuts of up to 40 per cent in U.S. federal science funding open a new door for Canada to grow domestically and lead globally, together with other like-minded countries.

We already have a strong foundation. More than 2,000 life sciences firms employ 220,000 Canadians and contribute $82 billion to our GDP. Global giants like Roche, AstraZeneca, Moderna, Sanofi, and GSK are already investing in Canadian facilities and biotechnology research and development. Homegrown companies like AbCellera in Vancouver and Deep Genomics in Toronto, successful through both public and private funding, are delivering next-generation treatments using cutting-edge technologies.

With the right policies and partnerships, we can build a thriving Canadian life sciences sector that saves lives, creates jobs, and generates long-term prosperity.

Where can Canada lead?

1. Biomanufacturing and Advanced Therapies

Biologics are medicines made from living cells that are revolutionizing treatments for cancer, autoimmune conditions, and rare diseases. Expanding domestic biomanufacturing means more high-skilled jobs and new global export opportunities.

2. Digital Health and Health AI

Artificial Intelligence is transforming drug discovery, diagnostics, and personalized care. With AI hubs in Toronto, Montreal and Edmonton, multinationals like Roche and Sanofi opening global AI hubs, and innovators like Deep Genomics already producing the world's first AI-discovered drug candidate, Canada is well-positioned to lead, if we invest wisely and modernize regulations.

3. Genomics and Personalized Medicine

Canada's universal health system and diverse population make it an ideal testing ground for precision medicine — treatments tailored to an individual's genetic profile. Organizations like Genome Canada and the Ontario Institute for Cancer Research are laying the groundwork for global leadership in this space.

From promise to prosperity

A single Canadian breakthrough can generate billions in exports and create thousands of high-value jobs, while saving millions of lives around the world. But to make that happen, we must act now — by investing more and improving our regulatory environment.

It's time for Canadian life sciences to take the lead.



Bettina Hamelin
President,
Innovative
Medicines Canada

To learn more, visit **innovativemedicines.ca**.

This article was sponsored by **Innovative Medicines Canada**.

INNOVATIVE MEDICINES CANADA

Canada's life sciences sector can power a stronger economy

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Bridging the Gap Between Rural Patients and Specialty Healthcare

BioScript Solutions supports Canadians with chronic illnesses and rare diseases, providing access to complex drug therapies and delivering full-service specialty care solutions.

Tania Amardeil

Millions of Canadians living in rural and remote areas are being left behind by a healthcare system that wasn't built for them. A shortage of healthcare providers and limited transportation makes accessing medications difficult. For those prescribed specialty drugs — often essential for treating rare and chronic conditions — seamless coordination and consistent dosing are critical. While everyone deserves equal access to care, for many, it remains out of reach.

One organization working to change that is BioScript Solutions, a Canadian-owned company delivering nationwide, end-to-end specialty care. The company has combined its physical network of clinics, pharmacies, and distribution centres with virtual consultations and home delivery — helping patients receive personalized care from the comfort of home, even in the most remote communities.

A patient's journey in Northern Ontario

"A patient living alone in remote Northern Ontario was missing doses because deliveries couldn't reach him. He also worked at a fly-in/fly-out job site with no refrigeration for his medication," says Kelsey Secord, Resource Nurse Partner at BioScript Solutions. "When he came to my office on a Friday, flaring from his condition, we quickly transferred his prescription to BioScript Pharmacy and had treatment administered at Coverdale Clinics within hours — avoiding another round of steroids. Now, Coverdale Clinics coordinates his infusions when he returns to town."

Blending innovation with a human touch

Alongside its wide-reaching network, BioScript has focused on balancing innovation with a human touch. By streamlining operations through process automation and a new pharmacy management system, its pharmacists, nurses, and patient support teams have more time to spend with patients.

"By investing in technology, we're able to bring BioScript Pharmacy directly to the patient, ensuring they receive timely, high-quality care in the way that's most convenient for them — whether that's virtual consultations, phone calls, text, or email," says Marc Grenier, BioScript's Vice President of Operations.

> **Ensuring no patient is left behind requires flexibility and creativity.**

Creative solutions for remote delivery

Shipping temperature-sensitive medications can present many challenges, such as long-distance delivery routes, unpredictable weather, and even a Canada Post strike. Ensuring no patient is left behind requires flexibility and creativity.

"We once delivered medication to a patient in Arctic Bay — the furthest north we've ever shipped. We worked closely with multiple carriers and airlines to fly it thousands of kilometres from our BC pharmacy. Soon, we'll be delivering to another location only accessible by a float plane that flies once a week. This patient works in remote resorts, so we have to get creative to ensure their medication arrives on time," says Calvin Chan, Pharmacy Manager at BioScript Pharmacy British Columbia.

Bridging the gap

Across Canada's vast and varied landscape, BioScript Solutions is using logistics, technology, and, above all, compassion to bridge the gap between rural patients and their access to treatment.

Visit **bioscript.ca** to learn how BioScript Solutions can support you.

This article was sponsored by **BioScript Solutions**.





MADE-IN-CANADA CANCER BREAKTHROUGHS:

A New Approach to Innovation

Canada has the talent and ideas to lead in health innovation — with BioCanRx bold action is underway.

Canada has a proud legacy of scientific discoveries that have changed lives around the world — from insulin to stem cells to the technology behind modern vaccines. But too often, Canadian innovations are commercialized abroad, missing the opportunity to translate homegrown science into homegrown solutions.

Take, for example, Dr. Daniel Drucker's groundbreaking work at the University of Toronto on GLP-1 peptides — the foundation of blockbuster diabetes and weight loss drugs like Ozempic and Wegovy. Although the foundational research and early development happened in Canada, the therapies were brought to market by companies in Denmark and the U.S., generating an estimated $50 billion global market. Canada was left largely on the sidelines.

Closing the gap

So how do we ensure Canada doesn't miss out on the next transformative health innovation? BioCanRx, a not-for-profit and national network focused on translating cancer immunotherapy discoveries into treatments, is doing just that by spearheading a distinctly Canadian approach to biomedical innovation.

> **Even if the cancer comes back, this has given me precious time, and I know the research will help manty others. It has given me a fighting chance.**
>
> - Camille Leahy

By investing in the critical translational stage between lab discovery and patient access via clinical trials, BioCanRx is ensuring that promising therapies are developed, tested, and manufactured here in Canada — for Canadians.

Proven results and real impact

Since its launch in 2015 with $40 million from the Government of Canada (leveraging nearly $110 million in partner contributions), BioCanRx has continued to receive national support — including $38 million from the Strategic Science Fund. And the results speak for themselves:

- 34 immunotherapies — including Canadian-made CAR T cell therapies — have advanced toward clinical trials
- 7 new biotech companies have been spun out
- 35 patent applications have been filed across 18 countries
- Over 400 Canadian cancer patients have gained access to novel, potentially life-saving therapies

Just as importantly, BioCanRx is building a skilled, collaborative ecosystem: linking researchers, clinicians, biomanufacturing experts, industry, regulators, and policy-makers across the country, while also seeking out global innovations and adapting them to the Canadian context. It's a model of how Canada can build not just scientific excellence — but the capacity to deliver it — and the results prove it can be do ne.

Taking the shot

With talent, ideas, and infrastructure already in place, what's needed now is bold investment to support translation of Canadian research into products and decisive action.

Wayne Gretzky once said, "You miss 100 per cent of the shots you don't take." In life sciences innovation, Canada can't afford to sit on the bench. Camille — a patient whose life was transformed through access to a Canadian-made therapy — and many others expect us to take that shot.

To learn more, visit **biocanrx.com**.

This article was sponsored by **BioCanRx.**

BioCanRx
Canada's Immunotherapy Network
Le réseau canadien d'immunothérapie



The New Nationalism

WHEN DONALD TRUMP kicked off his malevolent, idiotic trade war earlier this year, he expected Canadians to capitulate immediately. Instead, we raised our elbows—and about 41 million polite but firm middle fingers. The last few months have been alternately confusing, infuriating, nausea-inducing and wallet-draining, but they've also been kind of exciting. After years of political polarization, we're suddenly (mostly) united. Our cars and homes and restaurants are bedecked with maple leaves. We're demonstrating a David-versus-Goliath resilience that we didn't realize we had. Here, with glowing hearts, *Maclean's* presents an invigorating special issue devoted to the new patriotic North, examining how the threat of tariffs has upended our lives and what steps we need to take, as a country, to survive the next four years. The message is clear: forget post-nationalism. It's taken the risk of losing Canada to realize how much we appreciate it.

Concept by Christine Dewairy. Created and photographed by Justin Poulsen.



Never For Sale

This country has spent 250 years fighting American aggression. How resistance and resilience became the heart of Canada's national identity.

BY STEPHEN MAHER

ON JANUARY 7, DONALD TRUMP said publicly for the first time that he wanted to force Canada to become the 51st state. The president-elect had spent two months waiting to be inaugurated. He seemed to be yearning for action, to be on TV, to signal how he would lead. So he invited journalists to a gilded room in his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, stood behind a podium and spoke in a way that no American president had spoken in living memory. "You get rid of the artificially drawn line, and you take a look at what that looks like, and it would also be much better for national security," he said. "Don't forget: we basically protect Canada." Trump was talking like American leaders in the 19th century, bewhiskered men who used spittoons, men who believed their republic had a mandate from God to conquer and improve territories governed by lesser peoples.

It was hard then to know how seriously to take him, so I called a former senior American official to ask what to make of it. He was rattled. "I actually think he wants the territory," he said. His fear was contagious. An icy jolt went down my spine as he sketched out the scenario. Trump could escalate tariffs until the Canadian economy was in ruins, then make overtures to Alberta—a take-it-or-leave-it offer to tear it out of Canada.

"Why don't you become a state?" he imagined Trump saying. "You don't have to send billions of dollars to Ottawa anymore. Your tax rates will be lower. A dollar will be a dollar. You won't have to ask for permission to approve any pipeline, because you'll be within the United States." Could Trump play the nasty kind of game that Putin has played on the margins of the Russian Federation—stir up trouble and then send in the troops to restore calm?

The conversation terrified me. I started to wonder if Trump really thought he could get away with absorbing Canada. That

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PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS BY **JEFF HANNAFORD**



week, I ran into a former Canadian special forces operator and asked him if Canada could stop an American invasion. He laughed and told me it would be over before it began. The Pentagon could remotely shut down our communications, fire a few missiles and it would be done. A lot of Canadians were asking themselves the same questions, as Trump insulted, belittled and threatened the country, calling the prime minister "governor," promising we'd be better off as the 51st state. Eventually, even his press secretary smirked and joked about it.

It took time for Canadians to feel that jolt, but when they did, there was a national gut check. In the media, in the academy, in the halls of power, on shop floors, in pubs and at kitchen tables. Did we want to become Americans? The answer became clear soon enough, in the biggest wave of Canadian nationalism in living memory.

Absolutely not.

Never.

TWO DAYS AFTER TRUMP'S press conference, Justin Trudeau flew to Washington to attend Jimmy Carter's funeral. Trudeau had been recently forced to announce his resignation. Everyone was tired of him. Trump snubbed him at the funeral.

But somebody had to tell the Americans that Canada was not interested in becoming the 51st state. "That's not going to happen," Trudeau told Jake Tapper on CNN. "Canadians are incredibly proud of being Canadian. One of the ways we define ourselves most easily is, well, we're not American."

That answer struck Tapper as odd. A month later, when he had Mark Carney on the show, he played him the Trudeau clip. "Kind of a curious answer," Tapper said. Carney, then a candidate for Liberal leader, laughed nervously. He was too diplomatic to tell Tapper the truth. Canadians define themselves in opposition to the United States because the country was founded by people who rejected the bloody American Revolution. We've kept rejecting it for almost three centuries.

The United States is an unpredictable and increasingly dysfunctional empire, an extended experiment in pushing everything to the extreme. Canadians, on the other hand, have a long but imperfect history of muddling along peaceably. We are not bound together by some intrinsic identity—by language, race, religion or a shared and glorious history of revolution or conquest. We become nationalistic only when it is necessary to protect ourselves against the aggression of the United States.

That negative, defensive definition has always been enough. It is kind of the point of Canada.

THE STORY BEGINS IN 1763, after what Americans call the French and Indian War, English Canada calls the Seven Years' War and Quebecers call *la guerre de la Conquête*. It was a colonial border war between the French and British, fought with muskets and cannons, with troops in canoes and on long marches through the woods. Much of the real fighting was done by Indigenous people on both sides. The conflict ended with the

We become nationalistic only when it is necessary to protect ourselves against the aggression of the United States. That negative, defensive definition has always been enough. It is kind of the point of Canada.



conquest of New France, the expulsion of the Acadians and the British victorious but exhausted and broke.

King George III wanted to reduce his defence budget, so he issued the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which recognized the land title of unconquered Indigenous nations—still part of the Canadian constitutional order. That measure, which was both humane and practical, was unpopular in the British colonies on the coast from Georgia to Massachusetts because it meant they could not expand westward, over the Appalachian Mountains, into Indigenous territory.

Important American leaders, including George Washington, owned land on the other side of the mountains and would not accept the "artificial line." Their anger and lust for land helped provoke the American Revolution. The revolution's losers, the Loyalists, were driven into what is now Canada, where they settled down to build new lives as refugees, free from the mob violence they'd escaped.

French Canadians wanted no part of the American adventure and its militant Protestantism. They rejected the entreaties of Benjamin Franklin, who came to Montreal to seduce them. They preferred the guarantees of religious and linguistic protection the British had offered. When Benedict Arnold and a revolutionary army invaded, the Quebecers joined with the redcoats to stop them. Decades later, in the War of 1812, French Canadians again took up arms alongside their British and Indigenous allies to repel the American invasion. It was an alliance of peoples who did not want to be conquered.

Canada's three founding peoples—Indigenous nations, French Canadians and the British Loyalists—were all losers, forced to focus on survival rather than conquest or glory. The story of Canada is the story of their ad hoc co-operation, stuck between an expansionist, dangerous empire and a vast wilderness. To survive in that marginal space, to build a political system that could withstand the pull of American gravity and the push of American aggression, they forged a new, common identity.

And yet it has always had a tentative quality, because so many Canadians have other, stronger identities. There are so many grievances, so much mutual suspicion and rancour on the northern side of the border that the common national identity only becomes dominant when the Americans turn their covetous eyes toward the "artificial line" that separates them from the northland.

FIVE CANADIAN ELECTIONS have turned on Canada-U.S. relations. The first was in 1891, when Conservative prime minister Sir John A. Macdonald, then 76, faced Liberal Wilfrid Laurier, then 49. Macdonald had united the Maritimes with Ontario and Quebec, created Manitoba, built a railway to British Columbia and imposed tariffs to help develop industry in Eastern Canada. The Prairies filled with settlers, but it was a challenge to compete with the behemoth to the south. Then as now, productivity was lower than in the United States, and Canadians were migrating with their feet.

The whole project was in trouble, and things got worse when Ohio congressman William McKinley championed tariffs of up to 50 per cent, much like Trump is doing now. Laurier proposed reciprocity—free trade—with the United States. Canadians looked ready to dump John A. in the hopes that the Liberals could make a deal.

But the Americans didn't want a deal. They wanted to take Canada. U.S. secretary of state James Blaine wrote in a private letter that the United States intended to deny Canada free trade so that "she will find that she has a hard row to hoe and will ultimately, I believe, seek admission to the Union." A self-promoting Canadian businessman named Erastus Wiman—the Kevin O'Leary of his day—proposed "commercial union," as O'Leary is now proposing "economic union," the first step to erasing the border.

Macdonald managed to get his hands on a pamphlet in which a prominent Liberal journalist advised American allies on how to force Canada into submission. When he revealed it during a wild rally in Toronto, shocked Canadians rallied to support "the Old Flag, the Old Policy, the Old Leader," as the Tory campaign



posters put it. It was a resounding, election-winning wave of nationalism, confirming that Canadians were prepared to choose hardship and independence over annexation.

Sir John A. died later that year, and Laurier eventually became prime minister. He governed until 1911, when he campaigned on a trade deal that would have finally reduced the tariffs. The Conservatives were then the party of Canadian nationalism, and the Liberals were more open to modernizing influence from south of the border. But when an American congressman gave a speech saying he hoped to "see the day when the American flag will float over every square foot" of Canada, Conservatives rallied to beat the Liberals.

In the decades after, following two calamitous world wars, Americans came to think of Canada as an ally, not a potential possession, but the relationship still had its challenges. In the election of 1963, incumbent Progressive Conservative prime minister John Diefenbaker campaigned on Canadian nationalism after clashing with John F. Kennedy over nuclear missiles. But JFK and Liberal leader Lester B. Pearson were both popular, and the Democrats were not menacing the Canadian economy. Diefenbaker lost.

Philosopher George Grant saw that election as the end of the country. In *Lament for a Nation*, the most important book on Canadian nationalism, he blamed the Liberals for making Canada "a branch-plant society."

"Canada has ceased to be a nation, but its formal political existence will not end quickly," he wrote. "Our social and economic blending into the empire will continue apace, but political union will probably be delayed."

The obituary was premature. Instead, Pearson and his successor, Pierre Trudeau, created a new flag and a new identity based on bilingualism and multiculturalism. That new Liberal internationalism irritated the Americans. In 1965, Lyndon B. Johnson was so angered by a speech Pearson gave opposing the Vietnam War that he lifted him by the shirt collar and swore: "You pissed on my rug." Nixon privately called Trudeau an "asshole," to which Trudeau responded that he had been called worse things by better people.

By the 1980s, it was the Conservatives who were more open to greater alliance with the Americans. In 1988, Brian Mulroney campaigned on a free-trade deal he had reached with Ronald Reagan, against the opposition of Liberal John Turner and New Democrat Ed Broadbent, who warned it would lead to a loss of political sovereignty. A million more Canadians voted against the deal than for it, but vote splitting carried the day for Mulroney, who won a majority.

From then until just a few months ago, Canadian nationalism receded. Mulroney's trade deal produced greater prosperity, and the two societies seemed to be going in roughly the same direction as trade steadily increased. Both countries were changing to allow greater personal freedoms and racial and gender equality. Americans no longer daydreamed about extending their frontiers northward.

Then Trump was elected for a second time.

AS CANADA SETTLED DEEPER into the winter of 2025, and Trump kept boorishly insisting that Canadians would be happier in his clutches, we got mad.

Canadians yanked U.S. liquor from store shelves, cancelled trips and hoisted flags, even in downtown Montreal. Pallets of U.S. produce spoiled in the supermarket aisles. Normally bustling American border towns that depended on shopping day trips were suddenly silent. The U.S. departure lounges at Pearson and Trudeau were empty.

Nova Scotia Premier Tim Houston removed interprovincial trade barriers for any province that would reciprocate and, post-election, Mark Carney went a step further and pledged to dismantle all interprovincial trade barriers by Canada Day. Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew announced he was planning to let some electricity contracts with the States lapse and use much of that excess power to boost his own province's energy economy.

During the election, NDP and Bloc Québécois voters shifted Liberal en masse, setting aside their partisan inclinations to embrace the leader they thought could best protect Canada. Everyone was suddenly reminded of the reason for the centuries-old alliance between French and English Canadians.

Quebec Premier François Legault said Quebecers would consider east-west oil pipelines they had previously opposed.

People were soon speculating about a guerrilla war of resistance. The Americans might be able to take Canada, but could they hold it? How could they justify the casualties they would take? At the end of January, one of the most capable men I know texted me, out of the blue, that he had told his wife, the mother of his infant child, that he'd be "willing to die on the end of a rifle to make sure" the Americans could not take Canada.

It became clear how deep the feeling ran on February 1 at Ottawa's Canadian Tire Centre, where the Senators played the Minnesota Wild. Because Ottawa is a government town, and there are often as many Leafs or Habs fans in attendance as Sens supporters, it can be a dull place to watch a game. But there was nothing sedate about the booing as "The Star-Spangled Banner" played. Fans booed it heartily from start to finish, drowning out the unfortunate singer.

For pollster Michael Adams, president of the Environics Institute market research firm, who has been studying the Canada-U.S. relationship for decades, it was a seminal moment. "Oh, my God, it's not just the elites, who've always been suspicious of the United States," he said. "Ordinary Canadians are feeling it in their gut too. That doesn't mean they're going to grab their muskets and shoot Americans coming across the Niagara River. I don't think it's going to come to that. But they know this is wrong, and it's making them think about what they cherish and want to defend about Canada."

On *Saturday Night Live,* Mike Myers mouthed the phrase "elbows up," and the movement got its slogan. It found a champion in Mark Carney, who won a landslide victory in the not-very-competitive Liberal leadership race by promising Canadians would never knuckle under to Uncle Sam. Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, who was initially reluctant to turn his guns from the Liberals to the Americans, read his falling poll numbers and started saying he, too, would stand up to Trump.

Carney campaigned as Captain Canada. And while Poilievre's Conservative support stayed strong, NDP and Bloc Québécois voters shifted Liberal en masse, setting aside their partisan inclinations to embrace the leader they thought could best protect Canada. Lifelong New Democrats put Liberal signs on their lawns without a second thought. Everyone was suddenly reminded of the reason for the centuries-old alliance between French and English Canadians. And in the election that followed, as in the election of 1891, the will of the voters was clear. Canadians would take short-term pain to maintain their sovereignty.

ON THE SURFACE, Canadians and Americans seem similar, but deeper down, the societies are diverging. Michael Adams of Environics noticed a growing shift in values over the years, which he explained in his bestselling 2003 book, *Fire and Ice*. Americans had become more patriarchal over time as Canadians became less so. Canada is a more urban country, more multicultural and less religious. It remained steadily socially progressive while the United States got more divided. Christian nationalism, political polarization and sharp inequality are all higher in the U.S. Canadians live longer, are healthier, shoot each other less often, hate each other less, are more open to immigration. Fewer Canadians die deaths of despair.

What has happened is not that we have become more Canadian, but that Americans have become more American: more aggressive, violent and individualistic. In their recent book *The Upswing,* Robert Putnam and Shaylyn Romney Garrett argue that the United States is going through a period of intense polarization and inequality—just like the Gilded Age, when the Americans tried to annex Canada and Sir John A. rallied us against it. "Between the mid-1960s and today—by scores of hard measures along multiple dimensions—we have been experiencing declining economic equality, the deterioration of compromise in the public square, a fraying social fabric and a descent into cultural narcissism," they write. That cultural narcissism is the kind of thing that leads to casual annexation threats, to the assumption that Canadians might want to give up their country for another, to the anger when they refuse.

In every U.S. presidential election since 1992, polls show that Canadians have overwhelmingly favoured the Democratic candidate. Sixty-four per cent of Canadians would have voted for Kamala Harris, and only 21 per cent for Trump. Our national will to resist American gravity, to assert our independence, waxes and wanes depending on what is happening south of the border. What is happening now—the division of their society into mutually hostile camps, the militant expansionism, the breakdown of the rule of law—all of these things have happened before and, when they have, Canadians have hardened ourselves for hardship.

Canadians observed each other doing so and have taken pride in it. Eighty-five per cent are proud of their country now, up five points from a year ago. Adams, who has been studying the dynamic for decades, is not surprised. "We have the Trump bump. We're probably back where we were 10 years ago, at very high levels of national pride," says Adams. "It's a sense that we ought to pull together, and that we damn well don't want to become American."

It is not an inspiring national *cri de coeur*, but for centuries, it has been enough. ■

HOW TO FIGHT BACK



Trump's tariff war was a wake-up call for Canada to abandon its gentle complacency and take some big swings. Here are eight gutsy, radical ideas to secure the nation's future.

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Pour Money Into the Military

The armed forces need a radical influx of cash to bring in more soldiers, buy new equipment and defend Canada from global threats

BY AUREL BRAUN, PROFESSOR OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

FOR DECADES, CANADA LIVED a charmed existence. We assumed the U.S. would always defend us, that NATO would last forever, that Russia was a manageable threat and that China's interest in the Arctic was largely benign. We believed that the long peace in Europe would continue. So, despite being a G7 country, we let our military languish. Canada spent the last decade inching up our defence budget from a grossly inadequate one per cent of our GDP to a still-dismal 1.37 per cent, landing dead last in the G7. Ottawa has always had faith in international institutions and a rule-based international order, centred principally on the UN. Our attention remained fixed on international summits, diplomatic charm and humanitarian foreign aid.

That fantasy came crashing down when Donald Trump returned to the White House. Suddenly, the country we had

always relied on made clear it might not return the favour. At the same time, China and Russia have drawn closer, with Beijing bankrolling Russian energy projects in the Arctic and indirectly helping to fund its military build-up. China has declared itself a "near-Arctic state." The region, once considered remote and secure, is now a strategic front line. Our borders are not as distant as they used to be.

Our military doesn't reflect the country we are: a nation of 41 million, with global interests, vast territory and a responsibility to our allies. Transforming it will require a radical spending increase within the next two years, not the next 10, then a further spike to 2.5 per cent or more to be in line with NATO guidelines.

Our armed forces are simply too small for a country of our size and global footprint. The Canadian Armed Forces, though highly trained and committed, only have about 63,500 regular troops, well below our authorized strength of 71,500 and woefully inadequate to meet our domestic needs, let alone international commitments. In contrast, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Poland is doubling its already substantial armed forces, and France and Germany are moving rapidly in the same direction. With enough funding and strong recruitment efforts, Canada could grow its active forces to at least 100,000, which would be the number necessary to meet the country's defence needs and, symbolically, demonstrate our hard power.

Since our troops are limited, we also need a qualitative edge when it comes to equipment: cutting-edge technology, yes, but also basics. Our armour, aircraft and tanks have atrophied and are all in short supply. Canadian pilots fly a small fleet of 79 F-18 fighters that are older than they are, sailors operate obsolescent ships and soldiers face vast Russian armoured forces with just a few tanks. Our first batch of new F-35 jets won't start arriving until 2026—if they come at all. The five incoming offshore patrol vessels are welcome, but they're lightly armed and have limited icebreaking capacity. We still need heavy icebreakers in the Arctic and speedy delivery of modern frigates and destroyers. The slow pace of warship construction means that Canada should urgently reach agreements with efficient foreign builders for joint production, as the U.S. has just done with Hyundai shipyards in South Korea.

Our military doesn't reflect what we are: a nation of 41 million, with global interests, vast territory and a responsibility to our allies. Transforming it will require a radical spending increase.

None of this will be easy or cheap. But neither is sovereignty. As an academic, I certainly would prefer Canada spend more on education and health care than on defence, but the inconvenient geopolitical reality is that unless a country can protect its freedom and sovereignty, none of those other public goods can be delivered.

Make Canada a Shipping Superpower

Our ports, highways and rail routes need a 21st-century makeover

BY KENT FELLOWS, PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

FOR A COUNTRY DEFINED by its vast geography, Canada is startlingly bad at transporting goods. It's been 50 years since we got serious about building transportation networks, and now our lack of infrastructure is hampering our ability to trade with other countries and even between provinces.

Try moving goods from Alberta to Ontario, or from Saskatchewan to Nova Scotia. You'll find bottlenecks, missing links and backlogs at our overstretched ports. Montreal and the St. Lawrence River are inaccessible to many of the modern container ships, which blocks them from entering Eastern Canada. Meanwhile, the Port of Churchill has faced limited commercial potential due to seasonal ice conditions and poor inland connectivity. While jets can carry significant cargo to our territories, suitable runways remain limited.

We are certainly not short on ideas for how to fix this sluggishness. At the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy, we've long advocated a northern corridor—an integrated transport, energy and digital network across the North. Improved infrastructure in the North would increase the overall GDP of the territories to $6 billion—or $40,000 per resident. The impact on cost of living would be huge.

We can also improve our transportation networks by updating our ports. International shipping vessels and tankers are bigger than ever, but we're not set up to



accommodate a larger volume of crates. The Port of Vancouver, Canada's largest, is out of space. Land costs are soaring, and physical expansion is nearly impossible. But there are solutions. For example, we could reroute some shipments to Prince Rupert, a second, well-positioned port that's still underutilized. Deploying its full potential would limit clogging of the Vancouver port. We could also update our port technology—even something as simple as digitally tracking containers could help us maximize economic value.

We keep falling behind because we keep making the same mistake: waiting for the private sector to propose something and hoping the public interest aligns. That strategy may yield incremental progress, like marginal rail expansions or occasional highway upgrades, but it has never and will never deliver the kind of transformational infrastructure Canada needs. The public sector has always played a catalytic role in nation-building, so why are we now so reluctant?

In the short term, the focus should be on what's achievable: modernizing ports, fixing key choke points and planning future corridors with intent. But the real work will take decades. And that's okay. The Canadian Pacific Railway took 20 years to build. We're still reaping the benefits today. If we want our children and grandchildren to compete globally, now is the time to think in terms of generations, not electoral cycles. The future I want for us includes a second backbone corridor across middle and northern Canada, which ties into smaller regional corridors providing rail service, electricity transmission and fibre-optic connectivity to any and every moderately sized community across the country. By getting there, we'd achieve not only higher GDP but better social growth, with communities that are still largely remote making new trading connections with each other.

Yes, it will cost money. Yes, it will take time. And no, there are no quick workarounds. As Tolkien's Pippin put it, shortcuts make for long delays. We've delayed long enough. What we need is a national transportation strategy rooted in purpose, backed by public investment and built to last.



Find New Trading Partners

The U.S. isn't the only customer in town. Countries like India, Japan and South Korea are clamouring for Canadian goods.

BY MEREDITH LILLY, PROFESSOR OF INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC POLICY AT CARLETON UNIVERSITY

THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC volatility in the United States in recent months has forced many Canadians to wonder if it's time to diversify our trading partners. It's a fair question—and one we should have asked long before most people had heard of a tariff. Diversifying our trading partners, regardless of who the current U.S. president is, will make Canada's economy much stronger in the long run.

We don't need to ditch the Americans—nor can we. The U.S. is the world's largest market, and it's right next door. We share a language, regulatory environments and decades of integrated supply chains. But roughly 75 per cent of Canada's goods exports go south of the border, while the U.S. sends only about 15 per cent of its exports to us. That imbalance means we need the Americans a whole lot more than they need us.

Prime Minister Carney wants to reinvigorate our trade ties with Europe. I encourage it, but Europe is not a high-growth economic region, so we shouldn't settle there. We should also rekindle our relationship with India. Despite its explosive economic growth and demographic heft, our trade talks with them have remained stuck in the slow lane, in part due to our reliance on the U.S. We also need to lean into markets that want what Canada has—whether it's Saskatchewan potash, Alberta energy, Quebec aluminum or prairie wheat.

These markets are in the Indo-Pacific, especially Japan and South Korea. Japan is a destination for Canadian energy exports, beef, minerals and agricultural products, and its resource-dependent economy would readily import more Canadian natural gas. In exchange, they could trade us semiconductors, robotics and industrial machinery. South Korea is another energy-dependent country that could benefit from our oil while providing us with advanced electronics and circuits.

We need pipelines, ports and rail systems that can get Canadian goods to tidewater, not just south of the border. Take oil and gas—there's clear demand for Canadian energy in Asia but, without more infrastructure to move it, that opportunity remains stalled. Updating our infrastructure requires major regulatory reform: streamlining the approval of mines, energy projects and major industrial investments. Foreign investors aren't clamouring to build in Canada when projects get bogged down for years in red tape and environmental reviews.

Building trade relationships takes years, or even decades. It's not something we can do on a whim because relations with the U.S. turn sour. And that's why this work has to be evergreen—baked into our long-term economic planning. Waiting until the next cross-border spat erupts is too little, too late.

Keep Immigration Coming

To compete on the world stage, Canada needs more Canadians—and more small cities to house them

BY STEVE LAFLEUR, RESEARCH DIRECTOR AT THE INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON PUBLIC POLICY

CANADA IS ON TRACK to hit a population of 100 million by 2100—and that's a good thing. Rapid growth affords smaller countries some much-needed geopolitical heft. At 41 million people, Canada is still a relatively modest country in an increasingly unstable world. And with America becoming less reliable, we need to stand on our own two feet. More people would give us a lot more defence clout in a world where it's easy for the large to push around the small.

But problems arise when you take shortcuts, as Canada has by attempting rapid population growth without the basic infrastructure needed to support it. We're still building roughly the same amount of housing as we did in the 1970s. Most immigrants tend to settle in large, diverse cities with more economic opportunities, which then bear the brunt of the national housing shortage. It's easy to see why many Canadians were frustrated by the post-COVID surge of new residents.

Making sparser parts of the country more attractive is a better solution than cracking down on overall growth. Canada is a gigantic country with a bounty of land, but two-thirds of us live within 100 kilometres of the U.S. border. Canadians should view future immigration as an opportunity to upgrade some of our mid-sized cities to make them more competitive. We don't just need Maximum Canada, as some have called it; we also need Maximum Saskatoon and Maximum Sault Ste. Marie.

Winnipeg is a great example of mid-sized city growth done right. Since I moved there in 2012, the neighbourhoods surrounding downtown have blossomed. I'd argue that, dollar for dollar, Winnipeg has a quality of life that's hard to match. How does this tie in to immigration policy? Well, just over a quarter of the city's current residents are immigrants. Replicating that success in, say, Sault Ste. Marie requires more infrastructure projects to support those new immigrants. That means not only building local roads and transit but expanding interprovincial power transmission and thinking big about long-term infrastructure projects like ports and roads that can help diversify our export markets and promote Arctic security. This is where entities like the Canada Infrastructure Bank come into play. Multi-billion-dollar infrastructure projects can be difficult to finance—particularly in northern or remote areas. Something like the CIB, which is able to leverage private capital to build infrastructure, can be a huge help.

> Immigration is a chance to upgrade our cities. We don't just need Maximum Canada. We also need Maximum Saskatoon and Maximum Sault Ste. Marie.



The next step is to think bigger about regional economic development. There's a massive growth opportunity for Canada in the critical minerals industry, for example, but it will be powered by workers from Yellowknife, Edmonton and Saskatoon. We need to draw more of them there.

Canada's untapped geographic potential and growing economy sets us up well for a world where uncertain alliances spell trouble for smaller countries. We help power the global economy through our vast energy reserves, and our vast agricultural production feeds the world. We have what the world needs, and plenty of space for people from all over the world.

Immigration isn't just a source of demand, but of supply. If we're going to get serious about building more housing, we need more builders. And we don't just need them in Toronto and Vancouver. Using immigration to populate sparser parts of the country is a practice that dates all the way back to John A. Macdonald.

The good news is: Canada is more than just Toronto. Edmonton, which today has a population of around one million, was a city of roughly 148,000 just 75 years ago. There's no reason why today's cities of that size—your Barries and Reginas—can't be the Edmontons of the next century. We should embrace that nation-building spirit again.

Create a Cross-Country Power Grid

For decades, we've prioritized electrical trade with the U.S. It's time to reduce our dependence on them.

BY BLAKE SHAFFER, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

MY CAREER IN POWER TRADING has taken me from BC Hydro to Wall Street and ultimately to Alberta. Along the way I've learned how energy moves from one region to another. What I've discovered is a system that, while highly sophisticated, is strikingly unbalanced—favouring north-south connections with the United States while our east-west interprovincial connections remain underdeveloped.

At its core, power trading is like any other commodity trading, but with one key difference: electricity cannot easily be stored in large quantities. It must be generated and consumed almost simultaneously, creating a delicate balancing act between supply and demand that changes minute by minute. This means that unlike, say, oil or bananas, which tend to move consistently from point A to point B, power flows often change direction hourly, responding dynamically to evolving system conditions across interconnected regions.

This is where trading becomes essential. By connecting electricity systems, we can leverage complementary resources and demands across regions. Consider B.C.'s vast hydroelectric resources, which can generate abundant power on command. Alberta, meanwhile, might have excess wind power on gusty days. Through interconnected grids, these resources can be shared efficiently rather than wasted or duplicated. The larger the connected region, the greater the potential benefits.

And yet our electricity system remains what energy researcher Pierre-Olivier Pineau has described as "balkanized"—provincially siloed, with strong connections southward, but weak links between neighbouring provinces. Canada currently trades twice as much electricity across the U.S. border as we do domestically.

There's a better way. We could build an east-west power grid, prioritizing strengthened connections between our provinces. B.C. and Alberta are a natural fit, as are Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Ontario and Quebec, already reasonably large traders, could expand their partnership. And further connections between the Atlantic provinces—and potentially Quebec—offer significant regional opportunities.

The rise of renewable energy, particularly wind and solar, is a game-changer for interprovincial connections. These resources are inherently unstable—dependent on weather conditions that can change rapidly. Wider geographic integration helps smooth out this variability. When the wind isn't blowing in southern Alberta, it might be howling in northern B.C. When cloud cover reduces solar output in Saskatchewan, clear skies might prevail in Manitoba.

Canada's immense hydroelectric resources are perfectly suited to complement these intermittent renewables. Our reservoir systems act like giant batteries, storing water to generate power when wind and solar aren't producing. BC Hydro's system, for instance, can ramp production up or down almost instantly, providing reliable backup when the sun isn't shining or the wind isn't blowing.

Meanwhile, electricity demand is projected to rise dramatically in the coming decades. Electrification of transportation, heating and industrial processes will require substantially more power. Interprovincial connections can optimize the use of existing resources and reduce the need for each province to build excess generating capacity for peak periods or emergencies. This shared capacity represents billions in potential savings across the national economy—a huge competitive advantage in an increasingly electric world.

> Our electricity systems have strong connections southward, but weak links between neighbouring provinces

As we look ahead, the case for strengthening Canada's east-west grid connections has a new driving factor: the urgent need to reduce our dependence on the United States. This came into sharp focus when President Trump unleashed new trade tariffs earlier this year, accompanied by threats of annexation. For the first time in recent memory, provincial governments expressed a shared interest in dismantling interprovincial trade barriers, including those that apply to energy. This emerging sense of Canadian economic patriotism has breathed new life into the decades-old vision of interprovincial power lines traversing our country.

The story of Canada's east-west power grid is about more than just electricity. It's about national identity, economic security and environmental leadership. It's about whether we have the vision and political will to overcome provincial silos and build infrastructure that connects us as a nation.





Hold on to Canada's IP

Canada's future won't be built with bricks. It will be built with ideas.

BY JIM HINTON, FOUNDER OF OWN INNOVATION

THOMAS EDISON WAS a great inventor. But he was also a savvy businessman; someone who understood the true value of owning ideas. That's what made the difference in his famous rivalry with Nikola Tesla. Tesla's ideas were brilliant. But Edison controlled the patents, the licensing and, ultimately, the profits. Today, that same dynamic is playing out between Canada and the United States. We have no shortage of invention—just like Tesla. But without capturing the value of that innovation through intellectual property, we risk remaining an also-ran in America's shadow.

The core problem is that our policymakers and institutions are still playing by outdated rules. In the 1970s, about 85 per cent of the S&P 500's value came from tangible assets: factories, equipment, inventory. Today, more than 90 per cent of that value comes from intangible assets, like patents, proprietary software, trade secrets—all forms of IP. And yet we continue to operate as if we're still in that earlier brick-and-mortar economy.

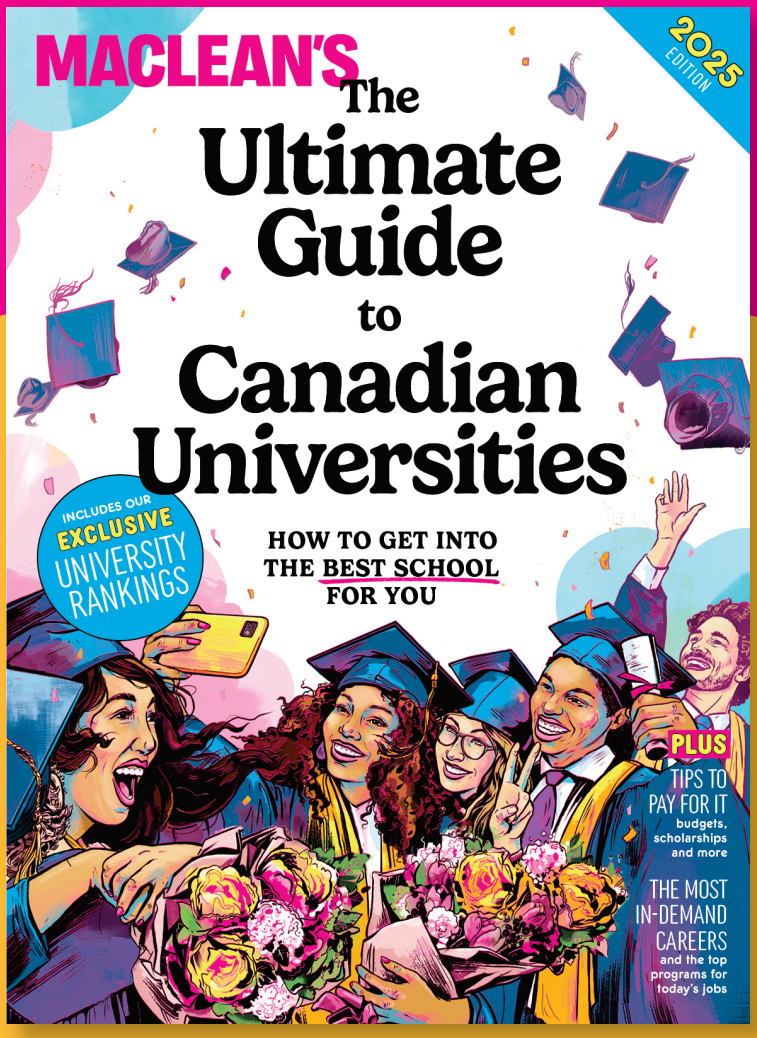
What's missing in Canada is the infrastructure to commercialize tech and IP at scale—something that other countries have invested in heavily. Instead, Canada has a fragmented system of small, under-resourced companies that lack coordination and often end up working primarily for foreign firms. Canadian researchers seeking to commercialize their ideas often end up selling them overseas—especially to the U.S., which offers far deeper funding for IP commercialization.

One way to help Canadian firms compete is by creating patent and data collectives: industry-specific groups that pool together their IP resources. In IP, there's strength in numbers. A single company with 100 patents is far more protected than 100 companies with one patent each. Canada's a relatively small market, and our firms often lack the scale to defend themselves in IP battles with corporate giants based in the U.S. or elsewhere. Collectives allow them to access shared legal tools and negotiate from a position of strength.

Another step is expanding support programs that already work. The Innovation Asset Collective, which I co-founded in 2020, is a $30-million, federally funded non-profit designed to help small and medium-sized Canadian companies build and protect their IP. Right now, it's focused on data-driven clean-tech firms. It's the first program in Canada to take a truly holistic approach to IP, offering training, strategic guidance, peer-to-peer networks, grant support—even liability insurance to cover legal costs if firms are accused of IP infringement. To make a broader impact, we need to extend this model well beyond clean tech.

In short, Canada doesn't just need more innovation. We need to own it. That means thinking less like factory landlords and more like IP lawyers. The economy of the future isn't built with bricks—it's built with ideas.

Essential reading for every Canadian high schooler



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Keep Critical Minerals in Canada

Canada is rich in natural resources. There's no reason it can't become a processing and manufacturing powerhouse too.

BY IAN M. LONDON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CANADIAN CRITICAL MINERALS & MATERIALS ALLIANCE

THINK ABOUT THE SMARTPHONE in your hand. It runs on resources mined right here in Canada: copper, lithium, tin, cobalt and more. These are among the 34 elements that the federal government has designated as "critical"—vital to our economy and crucial for technologies needed for the global energy transition. While we could be world leaders in extracting these resources, we don't manufacture or process them here. Instead, we import major brands from countries like China, Japan and South Korea. Canada exports more than $60 billion worth of critical minerals annually. Meanwhile, the global smartphone market alone is valued at $753 billion. It's a missed opportunity, lost through decades of complacency.

Where's the Canadian Samsung or LG? Nowhere to be found. This complacency goes beyond smartphones to other important technologies that rely on our critical minerals, like electric vehicles and the infrastructure used to power artificial intelligence. What we need is a complete domestic supply chain that transforms our critical minerals into finished products—right here, within our borders. Our ultimate goal should be nothing less than becoming a leading processor and manufacturer of the technologies of the future. The federal government has outlined as much in its Critical Minerals Strategy, announced in 2022. But this strategy was backed with a (very) modest $4 billion in the budget. That's nowhere near enough. Industry can't wait for government to move. Engineers, tradespeople, academic institutions and long-term financing experts all need to drive the ambition.

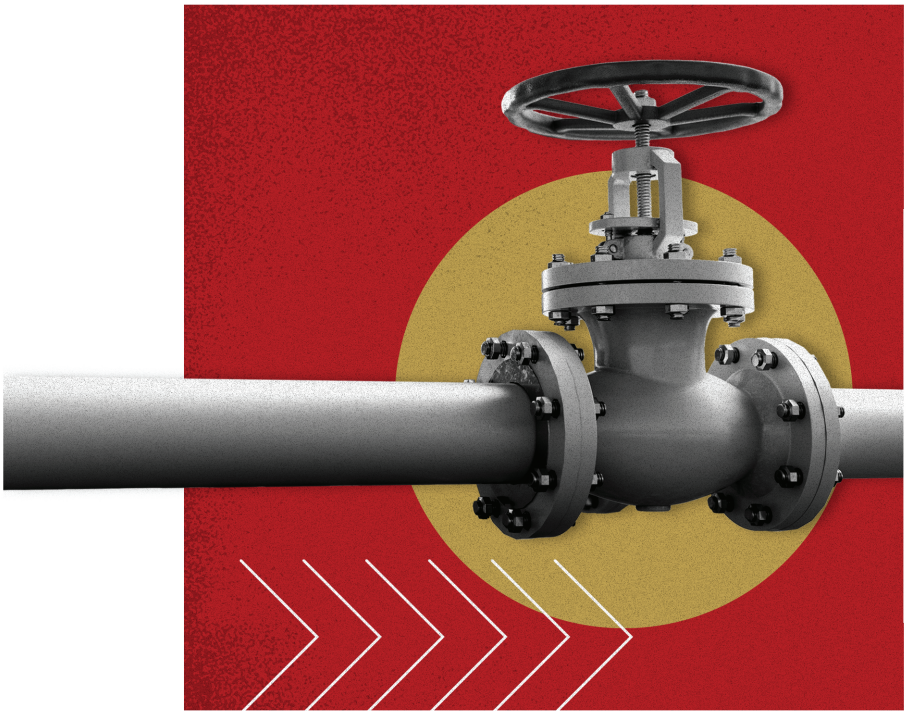
In South Korea, a country only marginally larger than Canada in population, companies like LG, Hyundai and Samsung get enormous government support. Canadian businesses and investors will be reluctant to build domestic critical mineral processing plants if they don't see similar, consistent policy backing: coordinated, policy-driven subsidies, tax incentives and public-private partnerships designed to create fertile ground for Canadian startups to sprout and thrive. In 2023, the federal government granted billions in subsidies to Volkswagen to support an electric vehicle battery plant in southern Ontario. Imagine if that money had gone to funding Canadian firms to develop, demonstrate, manufacture and promote batteries that were just as innovative.

> Canada's ultimate goal should be to become a manufacturer and processor of the technologies of the future



We can also take an ambitious page out of China's playbook by creating hyper-focused manufacturing and resource processing hubs. Since the 1980s, the Chinese government has invested countless billions in developing new cities that function as dedicated economic zones. One of the earliest and most successful examples is the city of Shenzhen, which has transformed from a market town with less than 100,000 people into a sprawling metropolis of nearly 18 million. Currently, it's a hot spot for international trade and home to one of the world's largest stock exchanges.

In Canada, these hubs could also be strategically located near transportation, energy infrastructure and critical mineral deposits to minimize logistical and environmental costs to streamline processing. By clustering related industries and educational institutions in the same area, we can build our own integrated economic ecosystems. This model doesn't just generate jobs; it builds economic strength and fosters a long-term culture of innovation. We won't just be making the tech of today—we'll be inventing and exporting the groundbreaking technologies that define the future. We're not just competing with China or the United States. We're battling our own complacency, the mindset that says we can't do it. We can't afford to keep seeing ourselves solely as the miners. We need to become the manufacturers and innovators, too.



Build New East-West Oil Pipelines

Oil is Canada's superpower in the global energy economy. Think of what turbo-charging production could do.

BY ADAM WATEROUS, CEO OF WATEROUS ENERGY FUND

TRUMP HAS MADE NO SECRET of what he wants from Canada: oil, and lots of it. Oil is our hard power—we have it at scale, and it can't be substituted. And right now we are wasting it. Canada produces some of the cleanest, most ethically sourced oil in the world, yet more than 90 per cent of our crude exports go straight to the U.S., usually at a steep discount. We sell low, buy back high and hope that Washington doesn't change the rules. Our negotiating position is based on the hope that America continues to want our oil and doesn't punish us elsewhere. This isn't a trade relationship; it's dependency. And it's dangerous.

That can change. We have to produce oil as though it's a national emergency—because it is. A major export pipeline would allow us to export one to two million barrels per day. Let's assume that the price of oil is $70. That means for every million barrels, we're earning $70 million a day. Over the course of the year, that generates $25 billion.

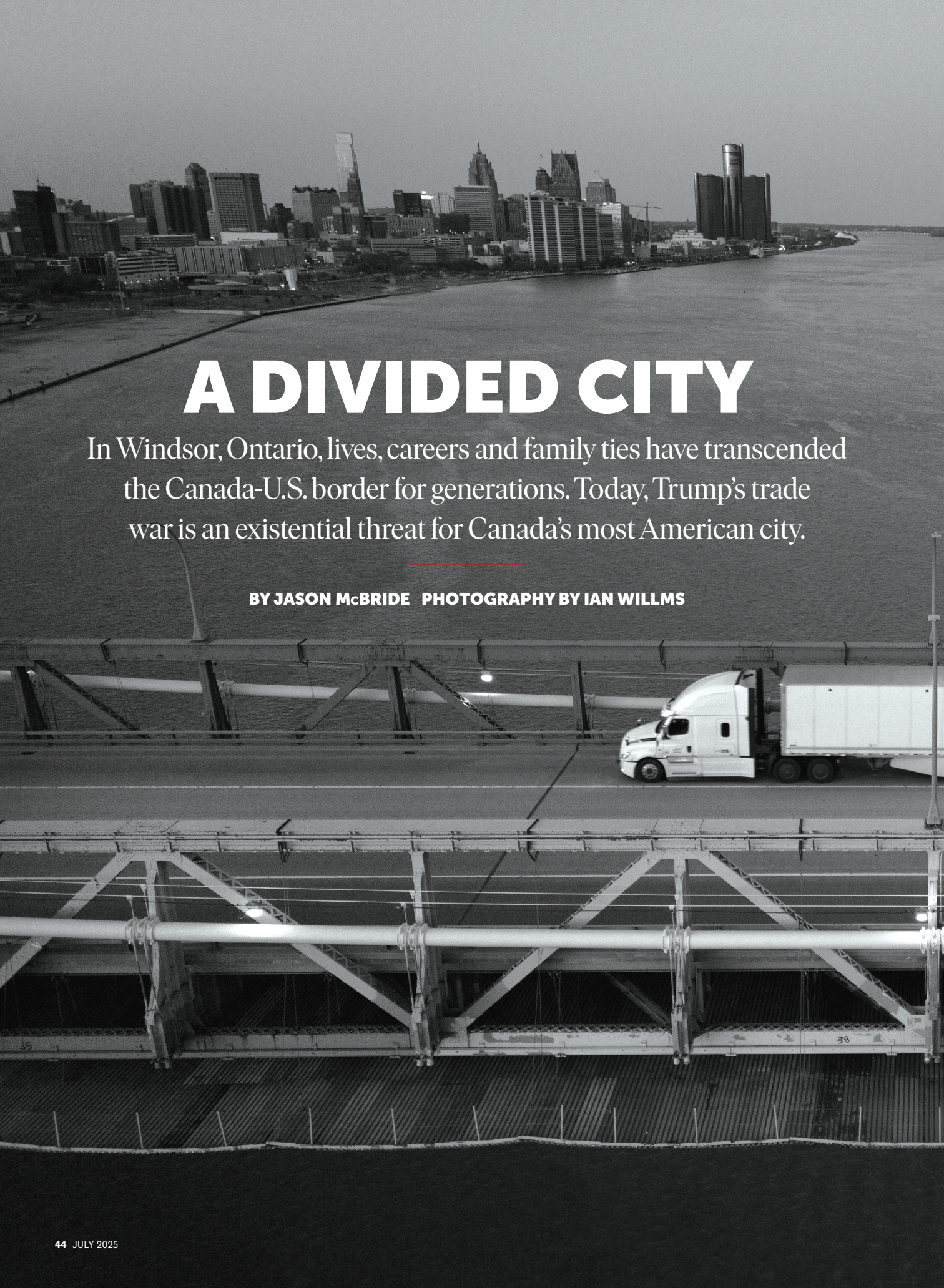
Expanding our energy industry could take as little as three years: six months to approve, six months of engineering and 24 months to build. The fastest way would be to construct the Northern Gateway—a pipeline to the B.C. coast that was previously approved but cancelled by the Trudeau government. Longer term, we could build a second pipeline to central Canada. Doing so would reduce our dependence on the states, supply our refineries at home, help us develop new trade partnerships across the world and bulletproof our economy.

A government-owned enterprise could lead development, but that model is expensive to taxpayers and notoriously slow. It took six years for the federal government to build the Trans Mountain pipeline; we do not have that kind of time.

The better route may be to attract private capital—particularly from U.S. investors who have an incentive to keep Canadian oil flowing. For that to be possible, we need a regulatory overhaul that includes repealing the pipeline-banning Bill C-69, the emissions cap and the industrial carbon tax. The government should also enact a maximum 90-day approval window for critical infrastructure. Otherwise, private investors won't be interested.

If we act now, Canada can expand its energy exports to two million barrels per day while continuing to ship four million barrels per day—our current volume—to America. That means tens of thousands of jobs, economic stability and the end of our single-buyer vulnerability.

Energy independence is national security. Trump may be cryptic, but his intentions are not: he wants oil. That's our leverage. And if we use it wisely, we can not only defend our manufacturing, steel and aluminum sectors from future tariffs, but also assert Canada's role as a global energy superpower. ■



A DIVIDED CITY

In Windsor, Ontario, lives, careers and family ties have transcended the Canada-U.S. border for generations. Today, Trump's trade war is an existential threat for Canada's most American city.

BY JASON McBRIDE PHOTOGRAPHY BY IAN WILLMS



NEAR AND FAR
Detroit (left) and Windsor (right) are separated by the Detroit River, a few hundred metres wide



THE PATRIOT Elaine Weeks has spent the past several months organizing anti-tariff protests and rallying supporters on both sides of the Canada-U.S. border

LIKE VIRTUALLY EVERYONE ELSE who's grown up in Windsor, Elaine Weeks spent much of her youth over the river, in Detroit. As a kid in the 1960s and 1970s, she went to the Detroit Zoo and visited Santa at Hudson's department store downtown. When she got a little older, she caught ball games at Tiger Stadium, ate tacos in Mexicantown and attended exhibitions at the Detroit Institute of Arts. The city felt big, dramatic and thrilling; with a metropolitan population greater than four million people, it was more than 10 times the size of Windsor. It was also shockingly close. The Detroit River, which separates the two cities, is only a few hundred metres wide. Even when Weeks wasn't physically in Detroit, she could hear and see it: the thump of concerts, the flashing of police sirens, the whine of race cars at the Detroit Grand Prix. In so many ways, living in Windsor was like living in a suburb of an exciting American city. It was certainly the one that loomed largest, much more than Toronto, a four-hour drive away. And nowhere was the porous, undefended border between Canada and the U.S. more permeable. "We're divided by water, but also connected by it," says Weeks. "Our border is literally fluid." In 2004, Weeks and her husband, Chris Edwards, started a small press called Walkerville Publishing. They've produced several books about local history and culture, and just about every one includes a bit about Detroit, too.

After Donald Trump was re-elected last November, it all changed. Weeks already had strong feelings about the president—she calls him "the orange maniac"—and when he began to publicly mock Justin Trudeau and muse about annexing Canada, Windsor's proximity to Detroit suddenly seemed to Weeks less like an asset and more like a threat. The night of Trump's inauguration, she lay awake imagining an American bomb attack on Windsor. "I was scared right away that they would send drones across the river," she says. "Because they want Canada. I thought, *We're sitting ducks here*."

That particular fear subsided. But as the 51st-state rhetoric ramped up, and Trump unleashed his impulsive, incoherent tariff policy, Weeks fought back. This spring, she helped organize the Canadian side of a cross-border rally. In late March, about 500 Windsorites gathered at the foot of the Great Canadian Flag, an enormous maple leaf installed at the foot of Ouellette Avenue, facing the Detroit skyline. Across the water, in Detroit's Hart Plaza, hundreds of Americans joined in solidarity. Protesters on both sides carried American and Canadian flags, brandishing homemade anti-Trump signs taped to hockey sticks. Weeks made a speech, as did local politicians, poets and actors. "The

Detroit is where Windsorites have friends and romantic partners, where their kids play in hockey tournaments and where more than 5,000 of them work. The defiant nationalism that has united other Canadians has been much harder here.

American people have a very tough fight ahead of them," she said, "and they are going to need the encouragement of their lifelong Canadian friends." The two sides did the wave at the same time. It was pretty genial, as protests go—more like a block party, an expression of friendship and a rebuke to the cruel chaos of the American government.

It was also poignant, due to the countless points of connection between the two cities. Detroit is where many Windsorites have friends and romantic partners. It's where their kids play in hockey tournaments. It's where they go to dine or to watch major-league sports. It's where more than 5,000 people from Windsor's metropolitan area commute every day, including nearly 2,000 health-care professionals. Since 1983, the University of Windsor and University of Detroit Mercy have offered a joint program that allows lawyers to get degrees from both schools and practise on either side of the border. The two cities' enormous Arab communities are so deeply entwined that you can buy shawarma poutine in Dearborn, a Detroit suburb. Windsorites use Fahrenheit when it's hot and Celsius when it's cold.

Most significantly, the two cities have been lashed together for more than a century by auto manufacturing and trade. Henry Ford founded the Ford Motor Company in Detroit in 1903 and, a year later, formed a joint venture across the river with the Walkerville Wagon Company. The partnership was mutually beneficial. The Canadian wagon maker's fortunes were revived by Ford's promising new technology, and—in an ironic twist of history—manufacturing in Canada allowed Ford to avoid tariffs levied in the British Empire on American goods. By 1924, Ford employed 3,400 people in and around Windsor. Every major American carmaker eventually followed: General Motors, Dodge, Chrysler. Combined, Detroit and Windsor were dubbed a "motoropolis." At the same time, the city became a hub for Canada-U.S. trade. As of 2022, nearly $400 million worth of goods, about a quarter of all trade by value between the two countries, crossed the Ambassador Bridge or passed through the Detroit Windsor Tunnel every day.

Until the trade war, those connections were only deepening. In early 2022, Stellantis, the Netherlands-based company that now owns Chrysler, joined forces with LG to build a $5-billion electric-vehicle battery plant in Windsor, the first of its kind in Canada. That same year, Stellantis announced it would retool its Windsor and Brampton factories to produce EVs, pumping another $3.6 billion into that effort. The Canadian government is spending $6.4 billion to build a new multi-modal bridge, the Gordie Howe International Bridge, to further bolster trade and co-operation. It's scheduled to open this fall. The result of all this integration was, until very recently, an uncharacteristic boom. Last year, Windsor's economy was among Canada's fastest-growing, and its population was exploding after years of modest growth.

The White House's tariffs—including 25 per cent levies on steel and aluminum, as well as passenger vehicles and light trucks—have put a sudden stop to the boom. They've also effectively pitted Windsor and Detroit against each other. No Windsorite blames Detroiters for the situation; the city and its suburbs voted overwhelmingly for Kamala Harris. But that didn't stop them from feeling a confusing mix of anger and betrayal. Renaldo Agostino, the city councillor for downtown, put it to me this way: "It's like we're next-door neighbours, our parents are fighting and we want to sneak out and play."

Most Canadians have responded to the trade war, and Trump's threats of annexation, with a defiant, unifying nationalism—and an instinctual protectionism of our own. We've cancelled vacations and academic conferences, boycotted Budweiser and avoided Amazon. This has been relatively easy in Toronto and Ottawa and Vancouver. Windsor hasn't had that luxury; its elbows can only go up so high. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce said in February that the three Canadian cities most vulnerable to tariffs were Saint John, New Brunswick (because of its oil refinery and dependence on exports to the U.S.), Calgary (where the oil industry is headquartered) and Windsor. In March, when tariffs went into effect, overall exports to the U.S. from Canada fell 6.6 per cent, and auto manufacturers began layoffs. Stellantis paused production in Windsor and in Mexico and laid off 900 workers at five U.S. factories. At a GM plant in Ingersoll, Ontario, hundreds more were laid off when the plant shut down. A plan to reopen at half capacity was announced later. In April, Windsor's unemployment rate surged to more than 10 per cent—the second-highest urban unemployment rate in the country, 1.4 per cent higher than the month prior and three per cent higher than a year prior.

Canada has always grappled with its relationship to the U.S.: how similar we are, how different we are and how much we need one another. What is Canada without America? For Windsor, such speculation has always been sharper: without Detroit, would Windsor even exist?

I'M THE RARE TORONTONIAN who spends at least a week or two every year in Windsor. I've got old friends there, both of whom work at the university, and I've developed a deep attachment to the city. It's a modest, rough-and-tumble, boom-and-bust kind of place, struggling to get a handle on poverty, housing and sprawl. But, like its Rust Belt counterparts in the U.S., it has been reinventing itself as a multifaceted urban centre, complete with cutting-edge innovation, flourishing



THE CIVIC BOOSTER Renaldo Agostino is a city councillor who sees Windsor and Detroit as a "two-nation destination" for tourism—a vision imperilled by the trade war

small businesses, inviting green spaces and a vibrant food scene. There are surprising pockets of physical beauty, such as the new Ojibway National Urban Park, the second national urban park in Canada. There is also more to experience culturally than non-locals might think. My perfect (admittedly touristy and bougie) day in Windsor would start with coffee at Chance in Ford City, followed by a long bike ride along the waterfront trail, a couple of hours browsing at Biblioasis—one of the finest bookshops in the country—and Lebanese food at Mazaar.

When I went down in early April to see exactly how trade turmoil was affecting Windsorites, the city felt like it always did. The cafés and restaurants were bustling. The mall was busy. The Stellantis factory—which normally employs more than 4,000 people—was in the midst of a two-week, tariff-induced shutdown, but even without a midday shift change, the afternoon traffic along Walker Road was bumper-to-bumper. Border crossings had slowed, but there were still plenty of people coming and going over the Ambassador Bridge. Of the dozens of Windsorites I spoke with, almost everyone had been across at least once that week, for work or play or both. Some Detroiters were doing the same. A couple of Windsor locals told me about the surge of people coming over, some for the first time, to spend money and show support for Canada.

But all of this concealed a pervasive sense of dread. The border has thickened before—9/11, Trump's first-term Muslim ban, COVID—but the trade war feels qualitatively different: more personal, more perplexing. One day, I passed by a landmark in Little Italy, a small residence known as Canada Dan's house, famous for its flagrantly patriotic exterior, with a red-and-white fiesta of flags, polar bears and inukshuks. It sported a new message to Trump that captured the city's conflicted mood: "Read our lips, Canada is not for sale. You can kiss us where the sun don't shine and you can put a big 'C' in front of it." It concluded with a more inspiring appeal to American patriotism: "Just like the Liberty Bell, let freedom and justice ring for everyone."

Things are most tense at Stellantis and Ford, the city's remaining auto factories. While the automotive industry has struggled for decades, battered by recessions, the pandemic and the loss of local jobs to automation and lower-wage jurisdictions, it still contributes more than $18 billion a year to the Canadian economy. As of last year, manufacturing directly employed 42,000 people in Windsor, one-fifth of the region's entire employed labour force. Most of that is auto manufacturing, and the industry's economic activity supports jobs throughout the city in restaurants, banks, hardware stores. Auto manufacturing has also influenced other local industries, spurring new developments in medical technology, agriculture and other advanced manufacturing. It's fair to say that if the auto industry folded, the reverberations would reach far and wide throughout Windsor.

James Stewart, the president of Unifor Local 444, which represents Stellantis workers, seemed shell-shocked when I met with him. "We don't sleep a whole bunch," he said. "The hardest part of this is that it's out of our control." The sense of impotence, the inability to do anything, was something I heard often, but it seemed particularly painful and frustrating for a union leader. Stewart's raison d'être is negotiation. Trump's zero-sum disregard for trade agreements—even ones he'd signed himself—leaves no room for bargaining and nobody to bargain with. Stewart has busied himself instead by talking to the Canadian leaders who'll listen: Mark Carney and Doug Ford. When he had those conversations, he said the same two things over and over. One,

The mood in Windsor is most tense at its auto factories, which are directly threatened by Trump's tariffs. Manufacturing employs more than 42,000 people in the Windsor area, roughly one-fifth of the labour force. An auto-industry shutdown would decimate the city.



THE UNION MAN James Stewart is the president of Unifor Local 444, which represents more than 4,500 workers at Stellantis's Windsor Assembly Plant. The unpredictability of the trade war has taken a heavy mental toll on him. He says he doesn't sleep much.

eliminating tariffs has to be the number-one priority, no matter what Trump says or does on a given day. Two, respond strongly. "I've heard people say, 'Sit back and don't make it worse,' " Stewart said. "You do that, well, then our industry's done." He and other like-minded auto workers were apparently persuasive. In late March, Carney pledged a $2-billion "strategic response fund" to support the sector. Soon after that, the government hit back with a matching tariff on U.S.-made vehicles coming into Canada.

By the end of April, workers had returned to the Windsor Stellantis assembly plant. But there was no long-term schedule in place, and it was still uncertain how long the plant would stay open. Around the same time, the company announced that it was moving some Mexican production to Michigan. Such uncertainty, Stewart feels, has suddenly become a way of life in Windsor. "Canada could resolve this in the next month," he said, "and then, two months down the road, Trump might say, 'Ah, I've read *Lord of the Flies* and I've changed my mind and I'm doing something different.' "

Over at the Ford engine plant down the street, a similar mood prevails. Krysten Lawton's family has been working at Ford for five generations. At 52 years old, she's been there for 30 years, currently working as a health and safety trainer. Her husband, Chad, works there too, as do their two sons, both in their early twenties. "Automotive has always been a rollercoaster," she told me. In the '80s, during a recession and with interest rates upwards of 20 per cent, her family lost their house. She's been laid off twice, most recently in 2011. Over the last three decades, she's watched five other auto plants close in the city, mainly due to U.S. automakers' exodus to countries with cheaper labour.

Trump wants to bring automotive jobs back to the U.S., but American carmakers have been in Windsor for more than a century. "We are not taking American jobs," says fifth-generation Ford employee Krysten Lawton. "These are Canadian jobs."

But the current trade war has been a whole other maddening and mystifying ordeal. Trump has positioned tariffs as a strategy to bring auto jobs back to the U.S., but to Lawton, such thinking betrays ignorance of the region's shared history. American automakers have been in Windsor for more than a century—one of the city's trendiest neighbourhoods is Ford City, formerly the company town that sprung up around Ford's plants in the early 20th century. "We are not taking American jobs. These are Canadian jobs." Besides, Lawton argues, the tariffs threaten to destroy jobs in both countries. Her plant makes the 7.3 and the 6.8 Godzilla engines, which go in the company's bestselling Super Duty trucks. There are about 2,000 parts that comprise each of those motors, and they're made all over the world, including in China. Putting tariffs on those parts, she believes, is financial suicide. "Stellantis and Ford can absorb some costs," she says. "But I don't believe the companies can sustain a 25 per cent loss across the board with all their parts suppliers. Ultimately, it will bankrupt them."

Don Rodzik Jr., the director of operations and general counsel at Narmco, one of Windsor's biggest parts suppliers, is in complete agreement. The family-run metal stamping business has been around for 80 years. It sells, among many other products, body panels, oil pans and bumper systems to just about every major car company. It has plants in Windsor and the nearby communities of Chatham and Guelph, as well as in Alabama and Mexico. It employs about 1,500 people, half of those in Windsor.

When I met Rodzik in April, the tariffs were already taking their toll—the Stellantis shutdown had forced them to lay off 40 employees. Trump had also threatened to hit vehicle parts with 25 per cent tariffs no later than May 3, a situation Rodzik said would be catastrophic for both Canadian and American industries, given that auto parts can cross the border up to eight times before final assembly. Suppliers wouldn't be able to absorb the levies, he said at the time, and the car companies wouldn't want to pay them. "If auto parts stop going across the border duty-free, that'll grind the U.S. to a halt," he said. "And when the U.S. grinds to a halt, this town will basically shut down, including us. Within a week, we'd be laying people off across the board."

In that moment, Rodzik had no backup plan—he'd never considered that the auto industry would be so profoundly threatened. Eighty per cent of his company's products go to the U.S. market. While it can theoretically stamp other products, such as household appliances or agricultural equipment, it has no contracts in those industries. When Rodzik walked the factory floor this spring, employees kept asking him: would they have jobs in a few years? He didn't have a good answer. "That's the heartburn," he says. "The not knowing, the unpredictability. I don't know how many conference calls I've had in the middle of the night. 'How do we figure out this executive order?' It's tiring and it weighs heavy on people."

To Rodzik's great relief, after some heavy lobbying from American automakers, Trump softened somewhat—auto parts compliant with the existing Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement were shielded from tariffs for the time being. But Trump's whimsy means that nobody in the auto industry can feel safe for long. If there is one thing Rodzik thinks might ultimately save the industry, it's the co-dependence of Detroit and Windsor. Because the two industries have grown up together and are now so comprehensively integrated, you simply can't attack one without damaging the other. "It's so interconnected here," Rodzik says. "And that's the beauty of it."

EVERY TIME THE AUTO SECTOR hits a bump in the road, so to speak, talk in Windsor turns to economic diversification. It happened after the 1965 auto pact signed between Canada and the U.S. ended in 2001, after the 2008 financial crisis and after the pandemic. An economic development report commissioned by the city in 2020 stated that "diversification beyond manufacturing is the key to Windsor's future." Trump has inadvertently made that objective even more urgent, as well as much harder.

Ryan Donally is an ex–pro hockey player who played four years on the farm teams of the Calgary Flames and Anaheim Ducks in the 2000s. He previously held several planning and economic development positions in the municipality of Lakeshore, immediately west of Windsor. He became the head of the Windsor Essex Chamber of Commerce in late January, a week after Trump's inauguration. Immediately, his days were consumed by the tariffs. By early February, he'd formed a task force with several of the region's major business leaders to hammer out some kind of strategy. Part of that involved reaching out to Americans directly. In interviews with Fox News and other U.S. networks, Donally reminded Americans how much Trump was undermining his own base in the Midwest, and reinforced the closeness between the two countries. "We can't sell our house," he told me. "Michigan can't sell its house. This relationship isn't going away. And it's important for us to maintain it, because three years or four months or eight days from now, when the Trump administration has theoretically run its course, this relationship will need to continue."

Maintaining Windsor's closeness to the U.S., while simultaneously broadening its economy beyond it, has proven to be a thin, difficult tightrope to walk. Detroit is just a 10-minute drive away. The next province over is an eight-hour drive. And the relationship with Detroit is key to any kind of diversification. Just as



BUILT FORD TOUGH Much of the neighbourhood near Ford's Windsor engine plant on the city's east side was developed in the early 20th century to house Ford workers



AN AMERICAN LEGACY Nearly 1,000 people work at Ford's Windsor engine plant. The company has been manufacturing vehicles at the site since 1923.



THE UNOFFICIAL DIPLOMAT Ryan Donally became president of the Windsor Essex Chamber of Commerce in January. His days are consumed by tariff anxieties. In interviews with American media, he stresses the closeness between Canada and the U.S.

open, mutually beneficial ties to the U.S. made the auto sector so strong for so many years, those connections have also been imperative for growing any other major local industry.

Agriculture was already flourishing in the region before the tariffs—about 28,000 jobs, if you count people who build the lighting for greenhouses, say, or manage logistics. So far, it's still going fairly strong. The local tourism business is more complicated; it depends on friendly relations between the two cities. While there are a growing number of attractions for Canadian tourists in and around Windsor (a handful of nearby wineries, the new urban park, and did I mention the Lebanese food?), one-third of all visitors are American. That includes many looking to get a discount on their dollar at the casino and the mall. Councillor Renaldo Agostino, who owned restaurants and nightclubs in the city before he went into politics, has long promoted what he calls a "two-nation destination," in which the two cities mutually benefit each other. Americans go to Windsor-Essex because their dollar goes further—1.7 million Americans visited the region in 2023, most of them daytrippers. At the same time, Canadians might travel to Detroit to watch the Red Wings play, but still stay in a Windsor hotel and eat in Windsor's restaurants. Every time a Detroit team gets into the playoffs, in fact, Agostino does a flag-raising in Windsor. Even if local autoworkers are justifiably outraged by Trump's behaviour, Agostino argues, the gravitational pull of Detroit is strong. "I don't care what anybody says," he told me. "If U2 books a show at Comerica Park this summer, you might say, 'Ah, I hate America, but I'm still going—it's U2.' "

The local tech industry, still relatively nascent but growing rapidly—more than 18,000 jobs in 2024, up 58 per cent over the previous year—has followed a similar script. Yvonne Pilon, CEO of WEtech Alliance, a non-profit tech incubator, says that Windsor's competitive advantage has always been due to its status as a gateway to the U.S. market. Many of the local startups that Pilon works with make software, which doesn't cross borders, per se, making it relatively safe from tariffs. A number of these startups are tied to the auto sector, but plenty aren't. Speaking to Pilon made me think hard about a question that feels almost taboo in Windsor: should the city get out of the auto business altogether? Can it? Ryan Donally is aghast at the thought. "We're talking double-digit unemployment rates within weeks," he says. "There have been diversification efforts



MAPLE LEAF FOREVER
Expressions of national pride have popped up everywhere in Windsor

Windsor and Detroit offer a way of resisting Trump's attempts to divide people, communities and allies. The long shared history of the two cities, full of friendship and co-operation, is a repudiation of that dark vision.



THE FORD FAMILY Krysten Lawton (left) is a health and safety trainer who has worked for Ford for 30 years. Members of her family have been employed by Ford for five generations. Today her husband, Chad (centre), is a Ford employee, as are her two sons, including Brody (right), who recently began an apprenticeship.

and, yes, they're continuing, but you remove auto from our industry today and we're in a very difficult spot."

When I asked Pilon if the tech sector could replace those jobs, she suggested that it was possible, eventually, with the right long-term investment and infrastructure. "Don't waste a good crisis," she said. She rhymed off a couple recent economic developments that had put some wind in the sector's sails—the battery plant, of course, but also a new automotive innovation incubator that Mercedes-Benz planned to open. It's unlikely that a small city like Windsor, especially with Waterloo and Toronto not too far away, could scale up its tech ecosystem enough to replace the auto industry's impact. But if it ever could, it would be most likely to do so by exploiting its greatest advantage: its access to Detroit and the surrounding American market. For example, WEtech has long partnered with its cross-border counterpart TechTown Detroit, and the two organizations have, among other things, created an initiative called Hacking Health Windsor Detroit to connect entrepreneurs, students and investors on both sides of the border. While the trade war has certainly made things more unpredictable, those relationships have remained strong. "The nice thing about startups is that their job description includes uncertainty," Pilon says.

Krysten Lawton, the Ford worker, can barely imagine Windsor without the auto industry. "It would be devastating," she says. But she's been through so many tough times before, and Trump has forced her to take this thought experiment further. She's now telling her children that they need a backup plan. Prior to working at Ford, her oldest son had been in construction, and there is the chance that he might return to that. But her youngest has just started a four-year apprenticeship at Ford. At this point, he has nowhere else to go.

A 15-minute drive away, though, on the other side of the city, I found a glimmer of possibility. Optimotive manufactures autonomous wheeled and tracked robots for use in the construction, mining and oil and gas industries. The nine-year-old company, which has offices in Windsor and Miami (the American office will soon relocate to Detroit), has been extremely successful. Last fall it received US$2 million in new investor funding, and it has clients in North America and the Middle East. The company's founder and CEO, Scott Fairley, gave me a quick tour and showed off a couple of the robots, proud as a dad at his toddler's first T-ball game.

After a week of glum, fearful conversation, the positive vibes were comforting. Optimotive had to deal with the headache of the tariffs too—some of its parts had been hit coming into Canada from the U.S.—but Fairley experienced this less as an existential threat and more as the cost of doing business. Based on the name of his company I could have guessed his perspective, but when I asked him what he thought about the potential collapse of the auto industry, he was sanguine. Building robots, he said, is not that different from building cars. He can easily imagine a future in which auto workers transition to the industry he is creating. In effect, he's getting ahead of the challenge. "Every problem is also simultaneously an opportunity," he told me. "There's a lot of great talent here in manufacturing and industrial automation, which has parallels to what we do," he says. "It might be bad for the region as a whole, but then we have our pick of the litter."



THE OPTIMIST Scott Fairley is CEO of Optimotive, which manufactures autonomous robots. He thinks Windsor's industrial workforce can shift from cars to other technology.

If there's one thing that's characterized Trump's nihilistic, irrational attack on democracy and the world order, it's been his relentless attempts to turn people against each other. He's divided Republicans from Democrats to a historic degree, but he's also divided white Americans from Americans of colour, rich Americans from poor ones and America as a whole from other countries. The pernicious goal of such division, for a transactional, predatory mind like Trump's, is to sever ties and create dependence—on him. Once isolated, it's easier to dominate someone, coerce them, rip them off. Windsor and Detroit offer a way, however imperfect, of resisting this. The story of the two cities is fundamentally a repudiation of Trump's dark vision. It is a story of friendship, mutual aid and economic co-operation. Boycotts and reactionary nationalism were natural, inevitable responses, but they were also what Trump wanted.

At the beginning of the pandemic, when the border closure felt different—less personal, more cruel—Elaine Weeks and Chris Edwards were working on a coffee-table book explicitly about the long, intimate relationship between the two cities. It contains stories about Detroit firefighters saving Windsor from fire in the 19th century and Windsor repaying the favour a hundred-odd years later, when buildings were set alight during the 1967 riots; about the evolution of border enforcement; about cross-border shopping. They titled it *A River Runs Between Us*, and in the preface wrote that it was "a tribute to two remarkable cities, bound by history, divided by water and, through thick and thin, united in peace, resilience and shared spirit." It'll be out in the fall.

But it won't be launched in Detroit, at least not yet. Weeks hasn't crossed the border in months, and doesn't know when she'll return. She's started a Facebook group called "Hands Off/Elbows Up" and continues to organize rallies and protests. The sounds of Detroit still drift across the river. Like everyone in Windsor, she watches and waits. "It'll be back," she says. "I mean, it's not going to be forever." ■

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FACES OF THE TRADE WAR

Donald Trump's trade war is an existential threat for Canada's small and medium-sized businesses. Every year, they export more than $200 billion worth of goods to the United States and import nearly $150 billion worth—including equipment, food, construction materials and other products they need to stay afloat. Now, as businesses contend with tariff-induced inflation, suppliers are disappearing, prices are skyrocketing and profit margins are shrinking or vanishing altogether. That puts small-business owners on the frontlines of the trade war. Here, five of them describe their hopes, fears and game plans as they navigate U.S. tariffs, Canadian countermeasures and an economic climate of unprecedented uncertainty.

INTERVIEWS BY ANDREA YU

“Each can could be 10 cents more, which would cost us nearly $1 million”

BY BROMLYN BETHUNE, PRESIDENT, STEAM WHISTLE BREWING, TORONTO

EVERYONE IN THE BEER BUSINESS KNOWS that January and February are slow. But this year has been different. March arrived, and sales stayed low—in bars, in restaurants, in stores. In fact, they were lower. It’s obvious why: all the talk of tariffs and a looming recession has people worried, and discretionary spending has plunged.

A bigger hit came in mid-March, when Donald Trump’s 25 per cent tariffs on aluminum imports came into effect. Eighty per cent of our beer sales come from 473-millilitre cans, or tallboys. The aluminum for the cans comes from Quebec, but there’s no Canadian manufacturer that can make the final product. Instead, Canadian aluminum is shipped to the U.S., turned into cans, and shipped back. With the new tariffs, each tallboy would cost us 10 cents more to produce—and we’ll need 9.1 million tallboys in 2025. That’s nearly a million dollars we hadn’t budgeted for.

That’s not the only tariff hit we faced. A few years ago, we acquired another Ontario brewery called Beau’s, and some of their beers use styles of hops and malts that we don’t grow in Canada. We used to buy them from the U.S., but now we’re looking in Canada and to Europe for alternative ingredients. That’s going to be costly, difficult and time-consuming. Developing and refining recipes takes months or more of trials and quality-assurance testing. You can’t just swap out one ingredient for another.

Thankfully, our incredible brewmaster and production teams are already testing batches with a Canadian malt. But that means we have to make space in our tanks for trials and bring people in who can do testing—another cost we hadn’t budgeted for. When we do land on new ingredients we’ll need to lock in a reliable supply chain on short notice, which will also be expensive. We think it’ll cost three to five per cent more to produce some beers. But we can’t pass that to consumers: we’re already a premium beer, and higher prices could push us off the shelves. So we’ll absorb the costs. We’ve also had to pause expansion plans, like high-gravity equipment that would have allowed us to expand our brewing capacity, but would have cost millions of dollars.

We’re looking for more places to sell beer in Canada, and we’re trying to bring more customers into our taprooms and restaurants with trivia nights and happy hours. The buy-Canadian movement has helped, too. Some of our partners, like golf courses, have upped their orders because Canadians are booking staycations at their properties. And, we got some great news in May. The company that does our canning in the U.S. told us they were moving tallboy production for Canadian customers to Canada, so that should save us from those tariff costs.

We know there could be a curveball at any time. It could be four years of this, or six months. But it’s been exciting, in a way—it’s forced us to figure out how to protect our business from any eventuality. Even if all the tariffs were lifted tomorrow, we’d still shift away from U.S. suppliers and switch to ingredients from Europe and Canada. We need stability. The silver lining is that we’ve been able to find and support new Canadian partners. In times like these, we all need to band together.



Photograph by **Duane Cole**



Photograph by **Duane Cole**



“I thought our entire business model was doomed”

BY LISA McEWAN, CO-OWNER, CGL TRANSPORT INC., TORONTO

MY MOTHER STARTED Hemisphere Freight in Toronto in 1985. It’s a customs brokerage firm that helps clients manage duties, taxes and tariffs when shipping across the Canada-U.S. border. My brother, Charles, and I took over in 2013. Nine years later, we created a sister company, CGL Transport. We don’t own our own trucks, but we connect clients with them. We work with a huge range of clients: manufacturers of noise-barrier panels, media conglomerates shipping telecommunications equipment, companies moving food.

CGL has grown 50 per cent every year since we started. We’ve faced headwinds, but those were nothing compared to Trump’s announcement, late last year, of tariffs on Canadian goods. I thought our entire business model was doomed. Eighty per cent of both our companies’ business depends on cross-border trade. My brother and I weren’t ready to give up; we’re still young and hungry. But we were scared.

In January, when the U.S. announced details of the tariffs, everything got booked solid almost overnight. The wait time for a truck went from 24 hours to two weeks, and prices from $2,500 to $7,000. To get our clients’ shipments where they needed to go, we had to improvise. One client, a franchisee for a restaurant chain, needed to deliver some equipment from the U.S. to meet a deadline. All we could find was a refrigerated truck, which was a huge risk—condensation might have collected inside that could harm the delicate equipment. We didn’t have a choice; thankfully, the equipment was fine.

On February 2, the morning after Trump signed his executive order to impose 25 per cent tariffs on Canada, things became really frenzied. The ambiguity of the situation was causing huge anxiety for clients, and I felt like a therapist, talking them off a ledge. People wanted us to drop everything and get back to them. Patience was running thin, everyone was exhausted and clients were making split-second decisions that we had to accommodate. One manufacturing client, who had been on the fence about buying a million-dollar machine, decided to pull the trigger to avoid tariffs, which would have been upwards of $250,000. I have two kids, and my brother has four, including young twins. There were many nights when we went home, put them all to bed and logged back in to answer emails and put together reports.

Things slowed down after that rush. In fact, business is now about 20 per cent slower than usual because of uncertainty over what will happen next. And business isn’t the only thing that’s slower. It used to take one or two hours for a truck to pass through customs. Now we’re averaging three to four hours at the border. Every day, we have a truck held at customs overnight; U.S. border security is scrutinizing more vehicles. Those delays have a trickle-down effect because truck drivers can only work a certain number of hours before they need to rest. That means delivery times and costs are going up.

Despite it all, I’m confident in CGL’s future. Ocean freight to the U.S. has declined, but it’s risen to Canada as shipments are diverted. We’ve expedited the timeline to open a Vancouver office so we’re better positioned to handle imports from China. I anticipate a huge increase in freight coming directly from China to Canada, avoiding the U.S. To combat this, we’re developing a new growth model—pivoting away from America and leaning more into the rest of the world.



Photograph by **Duane Cole**

“I didn’t feel safe travelling to the U.S. anymore”

BY JAMES McINNES, CEO, ODD BURGER, LONDON, ONTARIO

IN 2016, MY WIFE, VASILIKI, AND I started Canada’s first vegan fast-food chain, Odd Burger. Within a few years, we’d opened more restaurants in Ontario and sold franchises in Ontario, B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan. In 2023, we launched a line of packaged goods—chickpea burgers and vegan breakfast sausages—which we sold in grocery stores. We’ve had great success. Since we went public in 2021, our sales have grown 165 per cent. But we’ve always had our sights set on the U.S.

In 2022, we set up an American corporation and signed agreements with franchise developers in Washington state and Florida to open potentially dozens of restaurants over the next eight years. We even started redesigning our marketing material for the U.S. market, removing French from the packaging. We hoped to open our first U.S. Odd Burger in 2025, followed by a manufacturing facility in the U.S. to supply the American restaurants. We got a private American financier on board who was interested in investing $2 million. We hoped to eventually start selling packaged goods in American grocery stores, too. In the meantime, we planned to ship products from our Canadian manufacturing facility, located in London, Ontario, down to the U.S.

When Trump started talking about putting tariffs on Canadian products, I was worried, but not deterred. I figured that it might affect us temporarily, but costs would come down once our U.S. facility was built and we started sourcing ingredients from American farmers.

Then came Trump’s rhetoric against Canada: that we’re not a real country, and we should become the 51st state. The idea of investing in the U.S. began to feel extremely uncomfortable. In March, we heard about Jasmine Mooney, a Canadian actress and entrepreneur who was detained by ICE for 12 days when she crossed the Mexican border to apply for a work visa. I didn’t feel safe travelling to the U.S. anymore, and I couldn’t risk sending my staff down there.

Later that month, our U.S. investor backed out. He didn’t explicitly say it was because of tariffs; I think a lot of Americans were pausing international investments. They didn’t know what was going to happen. And neither did we. Our expansion no longer seemed tenable. We had a lot of sleepless nights, and long meetings with my sister Katie, who is Odd Burger’s director of operations.

In March, we halted the expansion. It didn’t feel right to work against our own country. We’re now refocusing on growing our business in Canada, especially our packaged goods line, which is already available in stores across the country.

We invested more than six figures into our U.S. expansion: legal fees, contracts with franchise developers, franchise and state registrations, trademark applications. We’re lucky we didn’t spend even more on leases for our restaurants or the manufacturing facility. If we had, it would have been a lot harder and a lot more expensive to back out.

As it is, I’m feeling good today about our financial future. Thanks to the patriotism Canadians are showing, we’re seeing tremendous demand for our products in stores. We hope we can resume our expansion one day—but probably not during the next four years. Trust in the current administration has been fundamentally broken.

“Reading the news made my chest tighten. My doctor told me I was close to a heart attack.”

BY DEREK HIRD, OWNER, EVOLUTION WHEEL, WINNIPEG

I STARTED EVOLUTION WHEEL out of my garage in 2014. We manufacture solid, airless tires for heavy equipment like backhoes, skid steers and other industrial and construction machinery. We make everything at our factory in Winnipeg: mixing our own rubber, cutting steel and doing metal fabrication. About 85 per cent of our products go to the U.S.

Most of our domestic competition manufactures their products in Asia, so when Trump was campaigning last year and talking about tariffs, I thought it was a good thing—all our competitors would be hit, and we’d have an advantage. That changed when he came to power and started picking on Canada and Mexico.

About 80 per cent of our material inputs come from the U.S., so the combination of Trump’s tariffs and Canada’s retaliatory ones means we’d be hit twice: once when importing materials, and again when exporting finished products. The costs would be enormous; a tire that used to cost $1,000 might go up to $1,400. We’re already at a premium price point, and I know our customers won’t pay more. The extra $400 would become our burden.

It’s hard to overstate the risk to my business. This spring, just reading the news or going over our accounting made my chest tighten. Sometimes it felt like I was struggling to breathe. My doctor told me I was probably close to a heart attack. This April, we were looking at $750,000 worth of orders that hadn’t shipped yet, trying to figure out how to foot a $250,000 tariff bill. Then Trump announced the tariffs were paused. Days later, Canada announced a six-month relief period for goods used in manufacturing.

I have no idea what we’re going to do after that. The uncertainty is a killer. If I know what’s going to happen, I can plan. Right now there’s nothing to do but plan for the worst. We’re looking at shifting some suppliers away from the U.S., but we’d have to buy a full container of products, like steel, bolts, nuts, washers and fasteners, to last us two years. That requires a lot of upfront capital. I’ve considered doing a hybrid manufacturing model, setting up a second facility in the U.S. But moving has huge costs, in addition to finding labour and training. I’m not sure it’ll be worthwhile.

I hate to do it but I’m speaking with the banks right now to secure a low-interest, seven-figure loan to help us survive. Our best option is to mitigate costs by continuing to grow. We just launched a new product—a wheel-loader tire that can be used in rock quarries, and waste management and recycling. It’s a high-revenue item and, if it sells well, it could help us weather future tariffs. A lot is riding on it. If my operation goes under, I lose everything. My house, my car, my retirement. I don’t have a family, but I have 40 staff with their own expenses.

Recently, I’ve been travelling to the U.S. to attend trade shows and speak with potential customers. Everyone talks about the trade war, and the government is dropping bombs with retaliatory tariffs. But I wish we were talking more about what we can do to improve the relationship—how we can collaborate instead of fight.





Photograph by **Aaron Vincent Elkaim**

"When Trump first announced tariffs, I thought, *You must be kidding*. All our products would be affected."

BY NOORUDIN JIWANI, PRESIDENT AND CEO, ALIYA'S FOODS, EDMONTON

I STARTED ALIYA'S FOODS IN 1999 with my wife, Anis. We make ready-to-eat Indian meals under a brand called Chef Bombay, which we started selling in the U.S. in the early 2000s, when interest in global flavours and healthy convenience foods really took off. We now produce about 80,000 entrees every day in our 100,000-square-foot facility in Edmonton and ship 85 per cent of them to the U.S.

Until recently, we also sourced a ton of ingredients from the U.S.: chicken, peas, carrots, potatoes, onions and more. When Trump first announced tariffs, I thought, *You must be kidding*. All our products would be affected. We did some scenario planning and found it might cost us up to $75,000 more each month. Our management team—me, Anis, my daughter Khadija and my nephew Hafiz—quickly made two key decisions. First, we weren't going to pass any price increases to our customers; and second, we weren't going to lay off any of our 325 employees. Our staff helped us build this business, and we're not going to give up on our people.

This meant we had to cut costs dramatically. Our purchasing team, led by Anis, immediately began hunting for non-U.S. raw ingredients to meet our specifications without compromising quality. But we knew from experience that switching suppliers would be difficult. For example, last year there was a global tomato shortage, and we had to find a new source of tomatoes, which vary enormously in moisture, flavour and sugar content, depending on where they're grown. We spent more than 100 hours evaluating them and finding new suppliers. And that was just one ingredient. We've made some switches already, like chicken, our biggest input cost. Most of it used to come from the U.S., but now we've got three chicken suppliers in Canada. It's costing us a bit more than what we used to pay. Meanwhile, our R&D team has been adjusting recipes to account for varying moisture levels and slight differences in ingredients.

Some things have been harder to replace, and they really show how interdependent the Canadian and American supply chains are. For example, Canada grows lots of potatoes, but it's hard to find a supplier that processes them to our specifications in terms of how the skin and eyes are removed and how they're diced and blanched. So we're still getting them from the U.S. for now. The lidding film on our trays is another tricky one to replace. We need ours to be both oven- and microwave-safe, but the supplier we found in Canada only makes microwaveable film. They're starting R&D on oven-safe and microwaveable film, so hopefully we can switch soon.

Our CFO has crunched the numbers, and we've found a way to balance our books for the next year, to make sure we're ready for what comes next. We're pretty well-positioned—now that we're using more Canadian suppliers, we're paying lower delivery costs and reducing our environmental footprint. This has also been an opportunity for my daughter and nephew, our business's next generation, to flex their leadership skills. Our entire team has come through. There's a real sense that we're in this together, and we're going to get through it together. ■



Photograph by **Jason Franson**



FIRST CHAPTER
Elizaveta Tarnarutckaia was volunteering at the Calgary Public Library when she discovered W.O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind?*, the first Canadian novel she read after arriving in the country

MY ADVENTURES WITH CANADIAN BOOKS

I left Russia as the country slid into authoritarianism and arrived in Canada knowing no one. In its novels, I found a blueprint for how to survive as a nation in the age of anger.

BY ELIZAVETA TARNARUTCKAIA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALLISON SETO

BACK IN JANUARY, I FELT LIKE I WAS living in two countries at once. Trump said he wanted to annex Canada and waged an economic war. In response, Canadians bought local with patriotic fervour. But in Alberta, where I was living, it felt like the opposite sentiment was swelling. I noticed more voices calling for U.S. annexation. On X, I saw posts from former neighbours and friends of friends cheering on the idea of becoming the 51st state. A few were even planning a "patriotic" lunch at Jack in the Box. I didn't know what future Canada would choose.

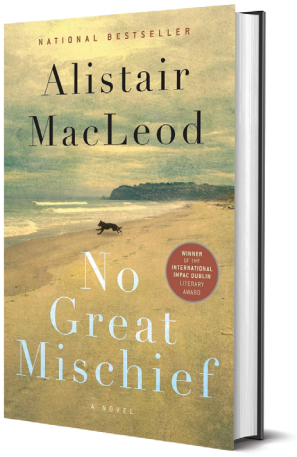
Right now, this country is taking a long, hard look at what it is and its place in the world. On instinct, we've turned quickly to governments, community leaders and policy experts for direction on how to be a nation. But we've forgotten one of our most powerful tools: literature. The Canadian canon offers clarity, a sensibility grounded in reflection and empathy. In the midst of our resurgent nationalism, its stories may just hold untapped potential in shaping our country's identity.

In the *Literary History of Canada*, published in 1965, the critic Northrop Frye described a "garrison mentality" as a defining feature of Canadian writing. He argued that early settlers saw themselves as isolated, vulnerable and surrounded by threats—both real and imagined—and that this ethos shaped Canadian

literature. Instead of tales of individualism, heroism or conquest, we told stories of endurance, traditionalism and the strong communal bonds that hold people together. Frye didn't love that. He thought the garrison mentality made for limited, even didactic, art. I disagree. There's plenty of imagination and complexity in these stories.

More than that, the garrison mentality resists the hyper-individualism of modern life. It pushes back against authoritarianism—not with slogans or policy proposals, but with the everyday ethos of caring for each other. You can't survive alone in a garrison, and you can't thrive alone in a country like Canada. The harsh climate forces people to work together. The garrison mentality is a framework for community, a necessary counterbalance to the atomization that defines much of late-stage capitalistic life.

I speak from personal experience. Ten years ago, I moved to Alberta from Russia, a place where literature deeply informs national identity. When I arrived in Canada, I noticed that people didn't seem to pay much attention to their homegrown novels. But I turned to Canadian fiction to make sense of my new country. It taught me that community is not only central to Canadian identity, but part of what holds us together when everything else falls apart. It was through reading Canadian that I became Canadian.



Writers are part of everyday Russian life. You grow up on Pushkin Street, go to school near Tolstoy Square and shop on Turgenev Highway. That kind of cultural imprint reminds you—subtly, constantly—that books matter.

IN 2012, I WAS LIVING IN SAMARA, a large city with more than a million people in southwestern Russia, nestled along the Volga River. I had just earned a degree in Russian literature and was working as a curator at a large literary museum devoted to Aleksey Nikolayevich Tolstoy, a Soviet adventure and science fiction writer and a distant relative of Leo Tolstoy.

If you grew up in Canada, chances are you've never been to a literary museum. It's exactly what it sounds like: a museum devoted to a writer's life and work. It's usually set up in a place where the writer spent time—their home, summer estate or place of exile. Inside, there are often archives, manuscripts, personal items and historical artifacts connected to the writer or the literary culture of the region. There are likely several hundred across Russia, from major national institutions to smaller collections housed in schools. Museums like these are one of the clearest expressions of the country's reverence for the written word.

Alexander Pushkin—Russia's most revered poet—has around 15 major museums dedicated to him. Some are in sites where he lived. Others are in places he only passed through, like the Alexander Pushkin Memorial Dacha Museum in St. Petersburg, located in the summer home where he honeymooned with his wife for six months in 1831. Literary giants are not the only ones who get this treatment. There are museums for lesser-known writers, too—names that might not mean much outside of Russia, like Dmitriy Mamin-Sibiryak, Gleb Uspensky and Nikolay Dobrolyubov.

These figures are part of everyday Russian life. Even if people don't read their books, they know their names. Streets and public spaces are routinely named after writers. You grow up on Pushkin Street, go to school near Tolstoy Square and shop on Turgenev Highway. That kind of cultural imprint sticks. It reminds you—subtly, constantly—that books matter.

For the government, literature can be both a powerful tool and a dangerous threat. During the Soviet era, the regime used writers like Maxim Gorky and Aleksey Tolstoy for propaganda. At the same time, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* was published in the West in 1973—after being banned in the Soviet Union—exposing the brutality of the country's forced labour camps, where millions of Soviet citizens died. It eroded support for communism and left-wing parties across Europe and undermined the legitimacy of the Soviet state.

The fraught relationship between literature and state power persists today. At the opening ceremony of the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, the government included a lavish segment about Russian literature, naming giants like Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and Chekhov. Under Putin, literature is used to project national pride, ideological strength and imperial ambition. But authors who criticize Putin's regime often face exile, while titles with LGBTQ+ themes are restricted or quietly removed from bookstore shelves. In Russia, literature has always been serious business—so serious, in fact, that many have perished for what they wrote.

IN 2013, ALEXEI NAVALNY was still alive and free, the war in Ukraine hadn't yet begun and writers like me were often able to work without censorship. I wrote one story for Golos, a non-profit that defended voters' rights and the only election watchdog that wasn't affiliated with the Russian government. I analyzed bills proposed by the local administration and, although my conclusions did not flatter officials, the article was published and I remained untouched.

At the time, I was dating a guy named Oleg. He'd foreseen that Russia was headed for authoritarianism long before I had: a few



TURNING THE PAGE
Tarnarutckaia was a literature scholar and museum curator in southwestern Russia. After Putin's regime annexed Crimea, she and her husband moved to Canada. Reading Canadian novelists helped her feel at home and understand the country.

years before we'd even met, he had already applied for permanent residency in Canada, as it was one of the few countries with an open immigration policy. We got engaged in 2013 and married the following February in Samara. It was a joyous celebration, but the most vivid moment from that time was when we were on our honeymoon, watching the news as Putin announced his decision to annex Crimea. I knew something dangerous had been set in motion.

My country had become stifling overnight. As I worked in a government-funded institution, it suddenly became mandatory for me to participate in regime-backed rallies—something I refused to do. While the authorities turned a blind eye for a time, it was obvious that this couldn't go on forever. Eventually, I would have to either fall in line or leave.

When my husband accepted a software engineering position in Calgary, I packed my bags and followed him to a country where I knew no one. Leaving my family, friends and the country where generations of my ancestors had lived was incredibly difficult. I knew that my career in Russian literature wouldn't transfer easily either. But it was the right choice. One month before I left, Russian police raided the Golos offices. A year after that, a court ordered the complete liquidation of the organization.

RIGHT BEFORE I MOVED TO CANADA, Alice Munro became the first Canadian to ever win the Nobel Prize in Literature. This was before shocking revelations about her personal life had damaged her reputation; at the time, her Nobel win made me proud of the country I was about to call home. I'd read some of Munro's

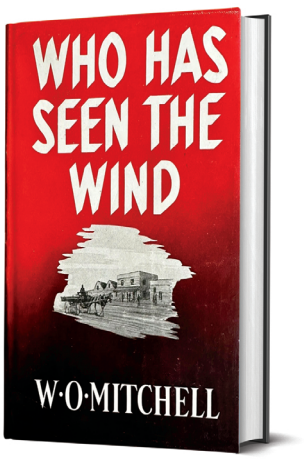
work back in my university years. Her quiet, powerful storytelling had made its way into Russian translations in the '80s, and she was often compared to Chekhov, which is probably one of the reasons why she's beloved in Russia. I thought, *Perfect! I may not know much about Canada, but I know Alice Munro. That'll be my go-to conversation starter.* Of course, I was being naive—very few Canadians I'd met seemed to care about her.

In his novel *The Dean's December*, the Canadian-American author Saul Bellow writes about a university dean as he reflects on his life in the U.S. and Eastern Europe—particularly how the East endures the ordeal of totalitarianism, while Western countries face the challenge of freedom. I found this to be true in my own life. Escaping totalitarianism was one thing; learning to live with freedom was another. It was a relief to walk down the streets without fear of corrupt police. What was more remarkable was to live in a country whose sole ambitions were to have peace and prosperity—one that had no appetite for post-imperial nostalgia, took no pride in its weapons or war victories and wasn't longing for a former glory.

But I'd never been to North America before. I wasn't used to a city like Calgary, with its shiny new skyscrapers, expansive highways and baffling lack of sidewalks. I've always been a walker, someone who wanders aimlessly through streets. In Russia, I could start my stroll right outside my front door and keep going for miles. But in Calgary, I often had to drive somewhere just to enjoy a decent walk.

Russian literature wasn't a viable way to make a living here. In a moment of desperation, I placed an ad offering private tutoring in Russian. I ended up with two students: a middle-aged barber who wanted to learn Russian because he thought Putin was "a cool and tough guy," and a security guard in his early twenties who had an online relationship with a Russian girl and hoped to impress her father, who he called a "tough man." Both were drawn to the "toughness" they imagined in my country—and both dropped the lessons once they realized that Russian nouns have genders and verbs conjugate.

Soon after, I started volunteering at the Calgary Public Library. One day, I was talking to an older lady, another volunteer, about how fascinated I was by Alberta's prairie landscape. Without prompting, she gave me a book recommendation. "Why don't you read *Who Has Seen the Wind?*" she said. I immediately borrowed it from the library and, just like that, W.O. Mitchell's classic from 1947 became the first Canadian book I read after arriving in this country.



Today, amid the buy-Canadian craze, I wonder why people are so quick to rally around Canadian beef, alcohol and clothing brands, but not Canadian novels. After all, our literature has long offered a blueprint for a national identity.

Set in a 1930s Saskatchewan town, the story follows Brian O'Connal as he grows from a quiet four-year-old into a teenager wrestling with the weight of mortality. Along the way, he loses his father, his grandmother and his beloved dog—each death shaping his desire to find meaning and order in an otherwise senseless life. For all its sorrow, I found the book deeply heartwarming. Its message was profound: that we can only truly be human once we accept life and people in all their complexities. It reassured me that, despite the existential solitude and despair we all experience, connection remains possible. Life, in the end, is impossible without a community made up of kind, cruel, saintly and sinful people alike.

Who Has Seen the Wind? hooked me on Canadian literature. I finished it and immediately reached for the next title on my Canadian shelf: *No Great Mischief* by Alistair MacLeod, another book that explores individualism and a longing for community. Set in Cape Breton, the story traces the legacy of the MacDonald family from their patriarch, who fled the Highland Clearances in the 18th century, to his modern-day descendants. This beautifully written novel, like Canada itself, is linguistically polyphonic, blending English, French and Gaelic, reflecting the cultural tensions that have shaped the country's history. At its core, MacLeod's work meditates on fractured community and the aching search for forgiveness, peace and kinship in an increasingly individualistic world. As the MacDonalds struggle to reconcile their Gaelic heritage with their Canadian identities, I also struggled to maintain close ties to my homeland while adapting in a new society.

AFTER MANY MONTHS of consideration, I enrolled in graduate studies at the University of Alberta's Digital Humanities program, which blends technology with the humanities. The program allowed me to take classes in various literary fields. That's when Alice Munro briefly returned to my orbit. We were discussing literary awards in one class, when someone asked who from Canada had won the Nobel Prize. I was the only one who knew the answer—and I'd barely lived in Canada for a year. I'm not suggesting that my classmates were uninformed. Far from it: I met so many smart people during my time there. But it's hard to ignore that Canadian literature lingers on the periphery of scholarly attention.

For our critical theory class, we were given a list of novels for an assignment. One of them was *The Break* by Katherena

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Vermette, a haunting portrayal of modern-day Winnipeg that centres on a Métis family whose lives are shattered by the brutal assault of a 13-year-old girl. Told from multiple perspectives, including the voices of Indigenous women from Manitoba, the novel paints a painful picture of trauma and resilience. Though *The Break* takes place decades after Mitchell's and MacLeod's stories, the central theme remains the same: a lost community that comes alive in times of crisis. My husband and I were drawn to Canada's reputation for multicultural inclusivity. But this novel offered a sobering counter-narrative, exposing the harsh realities many Indigenous communities still endure, shaped by colonialism.

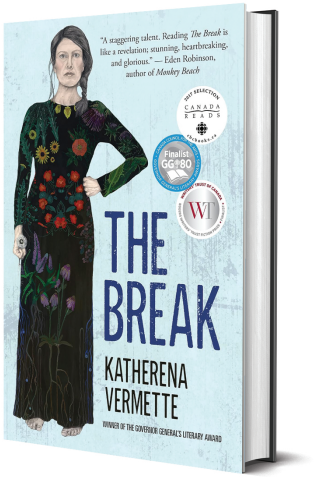
There are many other Canadian writers who helped me understand this country: Mordecai Richler, whose witty, adventurous voice helped me grasp the nuances of Canadian cultural identity and the tensions between tradition and individualism. Robertson Davies, who introduced me to the world of Canadian universities and intellectuals, as well as Canada's place within the broader European cultural tradition. And, of course, Margaret Atwood, who taught me that the relationship between people and wilderness shapes both personal and national identity. These authors helped me navigate not only the geography of my new home but its emotional and cultural landscape.

During my university years, as I devoured book after book by Canadian authors, I came across Northrop Frye's concept of the "garrison mentality." It was one of those moments where the right words perfectly capture a feeling you've been circling around for years. In the context of the nation's community ethos, everything I'd read suddenly made more sense. Back then, I had no idea the term was widely used or even hotly debated by literary critics and scholars. I just thought it was a brilliant, all-encompassing way to describe Canadian literature.

Today, amid the buy-Canadian craze, I wonder why people are so quick to rally around Canadian beef, Canadian alcohol and Canadian clothing brands, but not Canadian novels. After all, our literature has long offered a blueprint for Canadian identity. It captures our sense of community and national anxieties, much like the garrison mentality—a feeling of isolation, yes, but also a shared connection and sense of collective belonging.

I LIVE IN ALBERTA, the stronghold of Canadian conservatism. During the federal election this year, it was nearly impossible to spot a red or orange campaign sign on any front lawn—an ocean of blue and purple dominated the streets. My friends confessed that they were afraid to put up Liberal signs, fearing that people would damage their properties.

From the outside, Alberta might seem gripped by free-market ideology and rugged individualism. Yet, even here, I see a steady resistance to extreme libertarianism in the form of the province's strong volunteer culture. A 2020 report by the Government of Alberta found that half of Albertans over 14 years old volunteer, which is higher than the Canadian average of 44 per cent. Every year, more than 1.6 million Albertans volunteer around 262 million hours, contributing about $5.6 billion to the provincial economy.



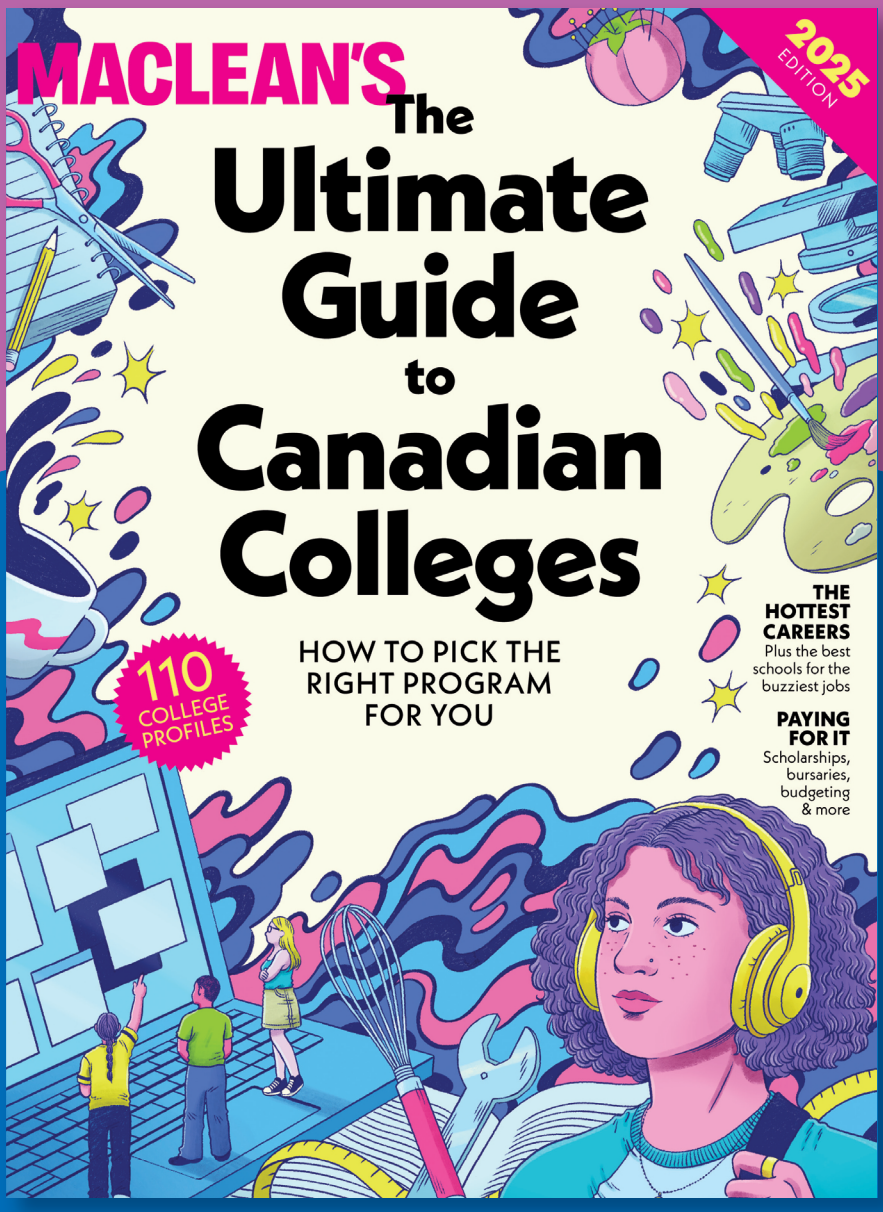
I doubt Alberta will ever separate from Canada. The enduring grip of the garrison mentality binds us together, forged in a shared experience of mutual survival amid vast, unforgiving landscapes.

The communal spirit in Alberta is perhaps best embodied by the grand Calgary Central Library, which opened in 2018. It's more than just a repository of books. It's also a civic hub that offers free programs like Indigenous services, a newcomers' desk, financial literacy workshops and youth volunteer programs—all of which address mental health, social integration and community engagement. I feel fortunate to live in a city and raise my child with access to such a wonderful library. It's my son's favourite place to go to—where he learned his first letters, made his first friends and borrowed his first books. He can't get enough of the *Franklin the Turtle* book series and Robert Munsch's wacky tales.

I doubt that Alberta will ever separate from Canada—no matter how loud the separatist voices may get. Beyond political and legal reasons, the enduring grip of the garrison mentality binds us together. Alberta's bond with Canada isn't just historical. It's psychological, forged in a shared experience of mutual survival amid vast, unforgiving landscapes. We have a resilient cultural bond that transcends political frustrations.

In her memoir *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Azar Nafisi tells the story of how, after the Iranian Revolution, she organized a secret seminar with her former students to discuss banned English-language books. They read Nabokov, Fitzgerald, Austen and James—works from different times and places in a country where you could be beaten for something as simple as painting your nails. They found these books spoke to their lives. Nafisi calls literature a "pocket of freedom" in a repressive society. Canadian literature is that refuge for me—a "pocket of freedom" within freedom itself. It has taught me not just to cherish liberty, but to use it to strengthen community. Freedom isn't just something to hold; it's something to cultivate, defend and pass on. Not in solitude, but with other people. ■

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SALT AND CEDAR

A couple build a minimalist retreat in sync with the Atlantic's stormy coastlines

By Lindsey King

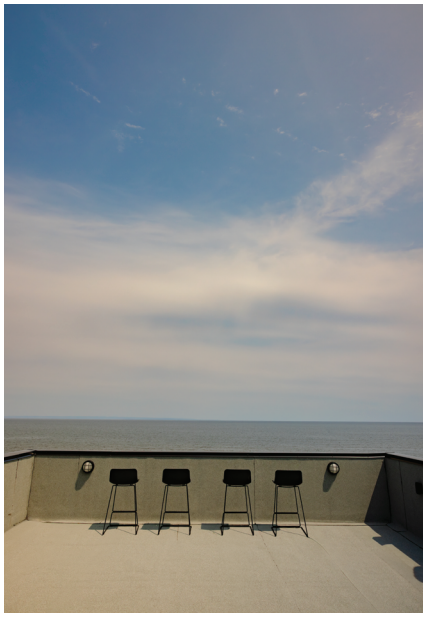
IN BATHURST, NEW BRUNSWICK, along the shores of Youghall Beach in Chaleur Bay, the seasons can be brutal. During the winter, snow drifts bury fences and the ocean can freeze into jagged peaks, as though halted mid-surge. Come summer, storm waves slap windows and strong winds shear beach grasses to their roots. But instead of resisting the area's horizontal rainstorms and the slow, corrosive work of salt, Chelsie and Joshua Jenks built their home in tandem with the natural world: when viewed from a distance, the boxy, sand-coloured house practically disappears into the shoreline.

SHORE THING Chelsie Jenks and her daughter, Della, spend many mornings strolling the sands of Youghall Beach—right outside their front door



→ **SUN-SOAKED** The home's panoramic windows flood the interior with natural light. Outside, extensive sandbars reveal the ocean floor at low tide, and the saltwater is full of striped bass, mackerel and shellfish.

↓ **DRINKS WITH A VIEW** While sunbathers crowd Youghall Beach on hot days, Chelsie and her husband, Joshua, often host drinks with their friends and family on their rooftop patio





Chelsie and Joshua grew up in New Brunswick with a shared affinity for the water. In 2018, the couple were looking to build from scratch and heard a cottage owner down the road was selling her waterfront property. At the time, all that stood on the land was a single-bedroom clapboard cottage, its grey shingles fraying and peeling away like the bark of a birch tree. The couple envisioned something more modern.

Shortly after buying the lot, Joshua met with Peter Braithwaite, a Halifax-based architect who went on to design the couple's home. Braithwaite remembers their first meeting vividly—it was a stormy Atlantic day, with hurricane-force gusts lashing the coast. "We met in the cottage. Sand was blowing in at our feet, and rain poured through the torn screen windows," he says. "But it made sense why Joshua and Chelsie wanted to build there. The property has an unimpeded view of the ocean, and the area comes alive in the summer."

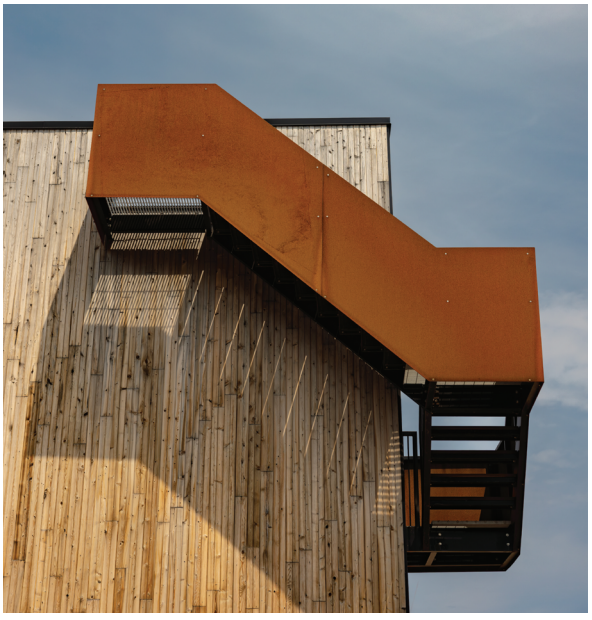
Braithwaite's team had to address the horizontal rainstorms, so they took inspiration from Cape Cod's resilient mariner homes, which have long withstood coastal turbulence thanks primarily to one material: cedar. For the home's walls, they chose locally sourced white cedar, which is more resistant to rot, salt air and warping than other woods.To prevent further weathering, Chelsie and Joshua dipped each piece of wood into a treatment solution. Over the years, as the cedar is stained by salt spray, pelting rain, UV exposure and time, it will change colour from pale yellow to grey, reflecting as well as resisting the climatic conditions.

Joshua and Chelsie cut costs by doing much of the labour themselves: they demolished the old structure, excavated and prepared the foundation for the new build, built a rock and sand breakwater and did the landscaping. The home is just 1,300 square feet, so many features do double duty, like the dramatic steel staircase that hugs two sides of the square exterior. Not only is this a space-saving measure that allowed for more indoor living space, but it also allows Joshua and Chelsie to go directly to the 600-square-foot rooftop patio, where the couple host friends and family in the summertime. "We love gathering for drinks on the beach, but having a wide view of the ocean from high up is a different kind of serenity." says Chelsie.

In the kitchen, one side of the island has been dropped down to create a dining







↑ **BAY WATCH** Built as a refuge against Chaleur Bay's mood swings, the home is a haven from snow drifts, salt spray and gales that can flatten the grasses outside

← **UP AND OUT** Wrapped in Eastern white cedar, the home is built to withstand rot, salt air and warping. And an outdoor steel staircase leads directly to the rooftop patio.

↓ **LITTLE BIG HOUSE** Every inch counts in this 1,300-square-foot home. In the kitchen, the blond plywood island doubles as a prep station and a dining table.



table, while the other side leaves space for storage. This allows Joshua and Chelsie to seamlessly switch from prep station to hosting hub—useful on special occasions like their lobster roll night, when the couple throw a party celebrating spring's seafood bounty, caught just hours earlier by friends with lobster boats.

Every morning, Joshua, Chelsie and their almost-two-year-old daughter, Della, start the day with the sound of the ocean. As the sun rises, Chelsie and Della often check the tide, collecting sea glass, rocks and shells as Joshua prepares breakfast. "Whether it's winter and the tides are moving through plates of ice, or it's a powerful thunderstorm in the summer, the ocean is always reacting to the weather," says Joshua. "It's amazing to witness." ■

MUSIC

A GLITTERING RODEO

LIVE IN CONCERT: SHANIA TWAIN

Various cities

July 5 to August 2



AFTER TWO YEARS of sold-out shows around the world for 2023's *Queen of Me* tour and at her Las Vegas residency, Shania Twain is still in high demand—so much so that she added a 17-stop encore this summer, plus a performance on horseback at the opening of the Calgary Stampede. Fans can expect a mashup of Twain's latest album and her chart-toppers, as well as special country guest stars like Kip Moore, Lindsay Ell and MacKenzie Porter. Twain, an admitted workaholic, has vowed that this is the last leg of the year. Then, she heads back into the studio to write new music.



THEATRE

A REGENCY REMIX

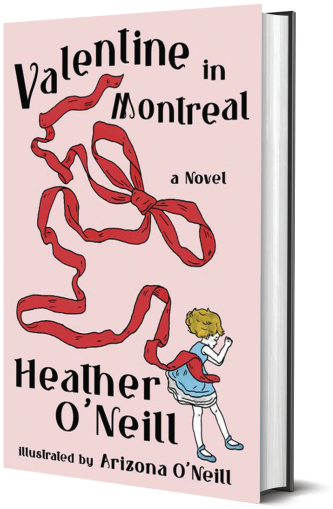
PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* (*SORT OF)

CAA Theatre, Toronto

July 22 to August 17

JANE AUSTEN's timeless social satire gets its own meta-satire in this retelling of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy's slow-burn love story—from the point of view of the servants. Thanks to quick costume changes, a five-person, all-female cast portray around 20 characters in the Regency romcom, scored with pop hits like "You're So Vain" and "Will You Love Me Tomorrow." Created by Glasgow-based actor, writer and director Isobel McArthur, the crowd-pleasing comedy became a sensation in London's West End before going international; this is its second run in Toronto.

Twain courtesy by Joseph Okpako/Getty Images; *Pride and Prejudice** by Mihaela Bodlovic/Mirvish Productions



BOOKS

A LITERARY EXPERIMENT

VALENTINE IN MONTREAL

Heather O'Neill and Arizona O'Neill

July 15

INSPIRED BY SERIALIZED novels of the Victorian era, Heather O'Neill took on a vintage literary challenge at the *Montreal Gazette* in 2023: a chapter a week, no work-aheads or retrospective edits, that must both stand alone for one-off readers and compile seamlessly to make a book. The result is *Valentine in Montreal*, 30 chapters about a lonely orphan named Valentine, who follows her mysterious doppelgänger around the city and discovers she's not as alone as she thought. Valentine's sagas come to life with whimsical drawings—the work of Arizona O'Neill, Heather's daughter.

ART

AN ENGRAVED SHOWCASE

NAOKO MATSUBARA

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

July 17 to January 18, 2026

IN HER 88 YEARS, Japanese-Canadian woodcut artist Matsubara has had more than 80 solo shows around the globe: from Switzerland to Mexico, America to Ireland, her birthplace of Japan to her home base of Canada, where she finally unveils her first solo exhibit with Toronto's AGO. Twenty of Matsubara's bold prints are in the show, including *Janusian A* (below). It also features a nine-minute documentary about her artistic life and process: Matsubara carves images inspired by nature—she's obsessed with trees, plants and birds—into flat sheets of soft pine, then makes colourful prints on handmade Japanese paper.





THEATRE

A COSMIC AFFAIR

NATASHA, PIERRE & THE GREAT COMET OF 1812

Royal Alexandra Theatre, Toronto

July 15 to August 24

IF YOU NEVER QUITE MADE IT through *War and Peace*, you should know that Tolstoy's behemoth tome has a 70-page tangent about how ingénue Natasha and her future husband Pierre first meet, all while the real-life comet of 1812 lingers ominously in the sky (a metaphor for Napoleon's invasion of Russia, obviously). Since its off-Broadway debut in 2013, Dave Malloy's musical reimagining of Tolstoy's masterpiece has rocketed to success, with 12 Tony nods. It's an electro-pop opera, often compared to *Hamilton* for its innovative historical retelling through a contemporary lens.

—Rosemary Counter

Cosmic Affair by Dahlia Katz/Mirvish Productions; *Janusian A*, 2015, by Naoko Matsubara, courtesy of Naoko Matsubara/Art Gallery of Ontario

"I fled war zones in two countries. Now I build homes in Alberta."

I left Ukraine behind, then Israel. In Calgary, I started over cleaning construction sites.

By Vadym Hrytsiuk

I GREW UP IN VYSOTS'K, a small village in northwestern Ukraine near the Belarusian border. After high school, I moved to Rivne and got a job selling Ukrainian sweets and cookies. That's where I met Yvanna, my partner for the past 15 years. Eventually, I joined my younger brother in construction, building homes across the country. I loved creating something real with my hands and dreamed of starting my own company one day.

In 2020, Yvanna and I moved to Israel so I could take a better-paying job in construction. We lived in Bat Yam, just south of Tel Aviv. The heat was nothing like I'd experienced, but I liked the people and the work. Then, in October of 2023, war broke out. Hamas was firing rockets into Israeli cities. One day, I heard a missile whistle overhead, then watched Israeli defence forces shoot it down. That's when I realized anywhere could be a target. Even picking up groceries felt dangerous. We were terrified and decided to leave.

But returning to Ukraine wasn't an option. Russia had invaded in 2022. There were widespread blackouts and bombings. My brother had managed to get out and move to Germany, but my mother and two sisters were still in Vysots'k. I worried about them every day. Yvanna and I felt hopeless, like we had nowhere to go.



"I recently learned an English expression: 'sink or swim.' That's what life has been like for me."

Soon, we heard about a special visa Canada had launched for Ukrainians called the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel. It offered two things we were desperate for: safety and the ability to work. An old Ukrainian colleague of mine was living in Calgary, and he said there were plenty of construction jobs available. That's how we ended up in Alberta.

After I arrived in Calgary in February of 2024, I printed my resumé and walked it around to various companies. In the end Mattamy Homes, a large homebuilding company, hired me as a labourer. My job was to keep construction sites clean; I swept out basements, cleared debris from backyards and moved baseboards and lumber around job sites. Back home, I'd been responsible for building houses from the ground up. But in a new country, I knew I had to prove myself. I accepted it as the price of starting over. I'd done it before in Israel, and I was ready to do it again here.

Six months in, I was promoted to home technician—basically, a handyman who gets houses ready before the new owners move in. I patched drywall, fixed cabinetry, installed shelving and touched up paint. It was physically demanding, which is why I think many people avoid the trades, even though we're short on workers. But I like physical labour and took pride in doing my job well and learning fast. I recently learned an English expression: "sink or swim." That's what life has been like for me. I just have to keep moving forward.

My biggest fear when I arrived wasn't the work—it was communication. But in Calgary, I've felt nothing but support. The company I work for paid for courses to build my construction knowledge, and my colleagues helped me improve my English. Yvanna found a job too, sorting packages at an Amazon warehouse. I hear people blame immigrants for the housing crisis, which doesn't make sense to me. I work alongside newcomers from Ukraine, Libya and all over the world. I'd invite anyone who criticizes immigration to come visit our job sites and meet the people pouring concrete, raising walls and wiring electricity.

After fleeing war twice, I've learned that people don't appreciate safety until they're somewhere dangerous. For me, a home isn't just where you live—it's where you're protected. After running from danger more than once, I understood peace on a deeper level. Every morning in Calgary, I wake up calm. That's a gift.

Even if peace returns to Ukraine, Yvanna and I want to stay in Canada. After so many moves, we're ready to put down roots. We're improving our English and gaining experience so we can apply for permanent residency. Starting over again in Ukraine would mean going back to zero. Here, I can keep building homes—and maybe buy one of our own, to share with Yvanna and the family we hope to have. ■

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