

RECONCILIATION STORIES:

A DAWSON
PEACE
PROJECT



This collection is a publication of
Dawson's *Inspire Solutions* project.
Its layout and design was prepared by Mike van der Burg,
with the cover page motif created by Cassi Design of Montreal.



RECONCILIATION STORIES: A DAWSON PEACE PROJECT

1	Introduction Pat Romano <i>Faculty, Humanities & Founder, Inspire Solutions Project</i>
2	Where Have You Been and Why Are You Still Here? SH Student, <i>General Social Science</i>
4	My Best Friend Hannah Kirk Student, <i>General Social Sciences</i>
6	I Am VS Student, <i>Social Services</i>
8	As He Changes with the Seasons Thomas Conlan Student, <i>Social Services</i>
9	Between My Conscience and Reality FB Student, <i>Social Services</i>
10	Crossing Paths JP Student, <i>Psychology Profile, Social Science</i>
12	From Foes to Friends SK Student, <i>Social Services</i>
14	"Why, that is his job?" Xin Ma Student, <i>Computer Science Technology</i>
16	Six Years MD Student, <i>Social Services</i>
17	The Words Unspoken TM Student, <i>Social Services</i>
19	My Older Brother Anonymous Student, <i>Social Services</i>

21	My Rock <i>Breana Prince-Harris Student, Social Services</i>
22	The Power of Forgiveness <i>JSJ Student, Social Services</i>
24	Daddy's Little Girl <i>Isabelle Richard Student, Psychology Profile, Social Sciences</i>
26	"It Seemed Like He Was Never There" <i>AD Student, Psychology Profile, Social Sciences</i>
27	A Mother's Love <i>MJC Student, Social Services</i>
29	Moving Forward <i>MS Student, Social Services</i>
31	De séparation à réconciliation <i>Philippe Lachance Student, General Social Sciences</i>
33	Not Ready for Change <i>EHB Student, Social Services</i>
36	Anramejona (1995), oil painting <i>Raymond Nardoza, Graduate (2014), Commercial Photography</i>
37	Enduring Regrets <i>AA Student, Social Services</i>
38	Third Time's the Charm <i>Valentina Hernandez Student, Child Studies Profile, Social Sciences</i>
40	Pressing the Button <i>Greta Hofmann Nemiroff Faculty, English, Humanities & The New School of Dawson College</i>
42	The Oskar Groening Trial: A Witness' Impressions <i>Judith Kalman Graduate (1974), The New School of Dawson College & author of The County of Birches</i>
44	Future: Synonym of Present, and Past <i>Meghri Doumanian Student, Modern Languages Profile, Creative Arts, Literature and Languages</i>
46	Learning About Forgiveness <i>Lily Ieroniawá:kon Deer Student, North-South Studies Profile, Social Sciences</i>
48	The Isfahan Blues <i>Ivan Freud Faculty, Religion</i>

INTRODUCTION

Pat Romano

Faculty, Humanities & Founder, Inspire Solutions Project

On behalf of *Inspire Solutions*, I invite you to read this collection of stories from the students and staff of Dawson College. The theme is reconciliation, a subject that seemed particularly appropriate for the inaugural year of the *Dawson Centre for Peace Education*, as our effort to rebuild relationships with those with whom we are divided – whether at the personal or collective level – captures the essence of peacebuilding. The response by the Dawson Community to our call for personal or family stories about experiences with reconciliation exceeded our expectations and speaks to the relevance of peacemaking in all our lives.

We live in a cynical time and I am regularly struck by how difficult it is to encourage my students to seriously consider the human potential for peace. While the stories in this collection are often heartbreaking, and certainly reveal our ability to hurt both those we know well and those who are strangers, each in their own way offers hope. These stories span from a focus on our intimate relationships with our inner selves, family members, romantic partners, or close friends to ones where our authors' own lives have been shaped by the suffering left by mass cruelty, and end with a story that reminds us of the common humanity that can be found even in the midst of cultural, ethnic and linguistic divides.

Each story, whether describing successful, stalled or failed reconciliation, ultimately reveals the human traits which make peace possible: the human resilience to move beyond our own pain and look to a better future; the patience to maintain the hope that a broken relationship can be rebuilt and that those who have wronged us can change; and the human compassion that allows us to move past our anger, understand that abusers are themselves victims and acknowledge that all of us are capable of making mistakes. Certainly none of these stories simplify the difficulties involved; peacebuilding is not always possible, needed apologies may never come, and sometimes the rebuilding of relationships will be left to future generations. These stories show the courage it takes to build peace – to take the chance of opening ourselves up to more pain and to possibly admitting our own mistakes – and the emotional barriers – fear, denial, pride, for example, that keep us from doing so. And, from the stories of success, we are left with the challenge to think about our own broken relationships and consider the possibility of reconciliation.

To end, I would like to thank all who helped make this project a success, starting with the authors of these stories, and the numerous others who sent us submissions. I thank them for their generosity and courage in sharing their very intimate experiences. The many who requested anonymity serve as a testimony to the difficulty of what we asked from them. I thank Marie-Eve Dufour, who inspired her students to participate in this project, and Madeleine Côté, Claire Elliott, Ivan Freud, Mary Hlywa and Greta Hofmann-Nemiroff from *Inspire Solutions* for all their help with reading stories and seeking submissions. I am most grateful to Mike van der Burg for volunteering many hours to do the design and layout for this collection, to Donna Varrica for her help in promoting the project and our Director General, Richard Filion, for his support for *Inspire Solutions* and indeed all our college's varied peace initiatives.

June 10, 2015

WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN AND WHY ARE YOU STILL HERE?

SH

Student, General Social Science

Sitting at the Harvey's that used to be right down the street from the Rose Bowl, my twin sister and I sat patiently, staring out the window. At seven years old, we were waiting to meet our father. He had left my mother when he found out she was pregnant, leaving her with the struggle of raising two kids with a single income that would soon vanish when she stopped working to take care of us.

How dare he just walk back into our lives as if he had done nothing wrong? Where had he been for the first seven years of my life? Asking myself these questions led to a buildup of raw emotions: resentment, frustration and hostility. My mother had done everything for us, sacrificing so much of herself and her independence; yet here was this man showing up out of the blue, and so easily, she took him back.

He moved in with us, and things quickly took a turn. I started to dread going home and started to resent my mother for keeping him around. He was mean in so many ways, to all of us, my mother included. Things began to escalate and my parents were constantly fighting; the cops were even called a few times. When I was 11, he left again and has stayed away since then. He still calls to talk to us, but I do not want to pick up that phone because of the amount of physical, psychological and emotional pain he has caused.

Being so young, it was hard to understand why my mother took him back and even today I still have questions. One thing is for sure though: I blamed her for all my unhappiness and trauma that he caused and so my resentment grew. After he left, although I was hostile towards my mother, I knew I needed to make things better. She did and still does everything she can for her kids, and I did not want to hold a grudge against such a loving person with such selfless values. For hours and hours we would talk, trying to the best of our abilities to see where the other person was coming from. A lot of tears were shed and a lot of yelling was done, but once everything was out, there was a sense of a new beginning. Now our relationship is much better,

and I help her with whatever I can. I admire how strong she is, and has been, and reconciliation was the only solution I saw for our damaged relationship. I would not be who I am today if it were not for both of our efforts in mending a broken bond.

My relationship with my father has not changed. He still does not send anything to support us, yet feels that he has the right to speak with us as if nothing happened. He gets angry that I won't pick up the phone, and accuses my mother of "brainwashing" us to hate him. But I don't need to be brainwashed to feel how I feel. The worst thing is that he has never apologized for a thing he has done to us. Maybe if he did I would consider moving forward with the whole situation, but until he realizes that he was in the wrong, I won't budge. He can tell me that I'm stubborn and he can tell me that I'm holding a grudge, but until he tells me that he's genuinely sorry, he can piss off and let me be the wonderful woman I have become without him.



PHOTO BY MIKE VAN DER BURG

MY BEST FRIEND

Hannah Kirk

Student, General Social Sciences

On the 4th of August, 2012 I married my best friend. I know it's a cliché, but it's true. For us, as a couple, marriage was the way that we signified our commitment to one another. This commitment was, and still is, to give sharing our lives with one another the best shot we possibly can.

During the first two years of our marriage, not only were we learning how to live with one another and share our space, we were actually still learning how to be around one another, as our relationship up until that point had been a long-distance one with him in Montreal, and me in St. Louis. I was also alone in a new city where I didn't speak the language, and relied on him more emotionally than either of us thought I would. This bred resentment from both of us. Me, because I had left my job, my family, and my security to be with him and he wasn't giving me what I thought I needed. And Him, because I had lost my independence and therefore was no longer the independent woman that he fell in love with and married. While we were both happy to be together, we struggled with the circumstances and with our resentments. We were taking a crash course in one another's habits and shortcomings, and tested each other on levels that even though we expected, neither of us knew how to handle. This resulted in us both taking part in behaviours that neither of us are proud of.

Eventually all of the arguments, name calling, and mistreatment of one another came to a head. All of our disappointments, bad behaviours, and lack of respect and support for one another resulted in a minor physical altercation, which caused me to flee to spend some much needed down time with my family. When I left, I told my husband that I was no longer comfortable with the dynamics of our relationship, and that something had to be done in order to make me feel safe and secure again before I would come back. I wanted him to acknowledge what happened, why it was wrong, and make a plan on how we were going to tackle this in the future. I don't think he knew it then, but I was willing to forgive all of the wrong-doing and bad behaviors, provided I received sincere, honest apologies. No "buts" or "ifs" included.

To him, I'm sure I was asking the impossible. And if I'm honest, leaving him alone for the month following our altercation was one of the most difficult decisions I have had to make. I knew he felt abandoned and as his wife and someone who cares about him, it broke my heart. But I knew that he had to sort this out himself, and I knew that in order for his decision to get help to be valid he had to do it himself. I also knew that I was little to no help to him in my emotional state, but that didn't make it any easier. After this experience, I can understand why and how sufferers of domestic abuse are able to keep themselves in their situation so easily, even when everyone is telling them to get out.

Eventually, my husband decided that his behaviour was in fact problematic, and that he was going to get help for it. He took the initiative himself, and started therapy two weeks after the incident. Before starting therapy I think that there was a part of my husband that held me responsible for what had happened, as if my behaviour played a larger role in our incident than it did. However, during his sessions he learned how to take full responsibility for his behavior and discovered that he could trace back his difficulties to traumatic and abusive events that happened in his childhood. Of course, this wasn't the end of the conflict. Even though I was very aware of why the altercation took place, and that our situation was improving on a day-to-day basis, I was still resentful. I was still angry. I still felt violated.

Forgiving my husband for what he did was not easy by any means. When a trust as deep as mine was violated, it takes more than a couple of weeks of "good behaviour" or an apology to forgive. It takes time, and it takes patience. Much like most other things within a marriage, it is a two-person job. During the first few months after I returned to Montreal, I was still waiting for the other shoe to fall. I was waiting for his previous behaviour to come back, and I was ready to react to it at the drop of a hat. This meant that while my husband was trying to move forward and change the things about him that were causing problems in his life, he had to deal with me being stuck in that moment.

After about 6 months, I was able to forgive. The fact that my husband was aware that his behavior was troublesome and that he was able to acknowledge and validate the way I felt about our altercation, showed me that his apologies were sincere and true. His new behaviours gave me the freedom to express my feelings towards him and provided me with the reassurance I needed to feel comfortable again.

Fast forward another 2 years, and we are happier and stronger than we have ever been before. We are aware that there will be other times in our life where our relationship is tested, but we have faith that we will be able to overcome them because our past shows that we are capable of doing so. There are still moments where his behaviour isn't favorable, and my fears cause me to fly off the handle, but we are comfortable with one another on a level that most couples aren't. We are able to discuss one another's flaws and shortcomings without feeling attacked or insecure because of the conflicts we have been able to resolve and overcome. The fact that I have been able to truly forgive him for the things he's done in the past makes us more forgiving on a day to day basis and prevents us from becoming resentful in the future. Because of what we experienced, our lines of communication are stronger and we trust each other more than we did before.

I AM

VS

Student, Social Services

I was hurt.

Wounded.

Torn, broken, shattered, bruised & bloodied, left for dead.

This world is unkind & does nothing but damage.

I used to tell myself: "Kill it like you always do. Walk strong. Stay fierce. Smile the whole way through. You got this. You got this."

Little by little I started losing my way. My fire became a flicker. I couldn't look them in the eye. I would fake a smile, and put on my makeup, to fool the world and keep them all away... But I knew the truth. I knew it was gone. I'd lost it and had no idea how to get it back...

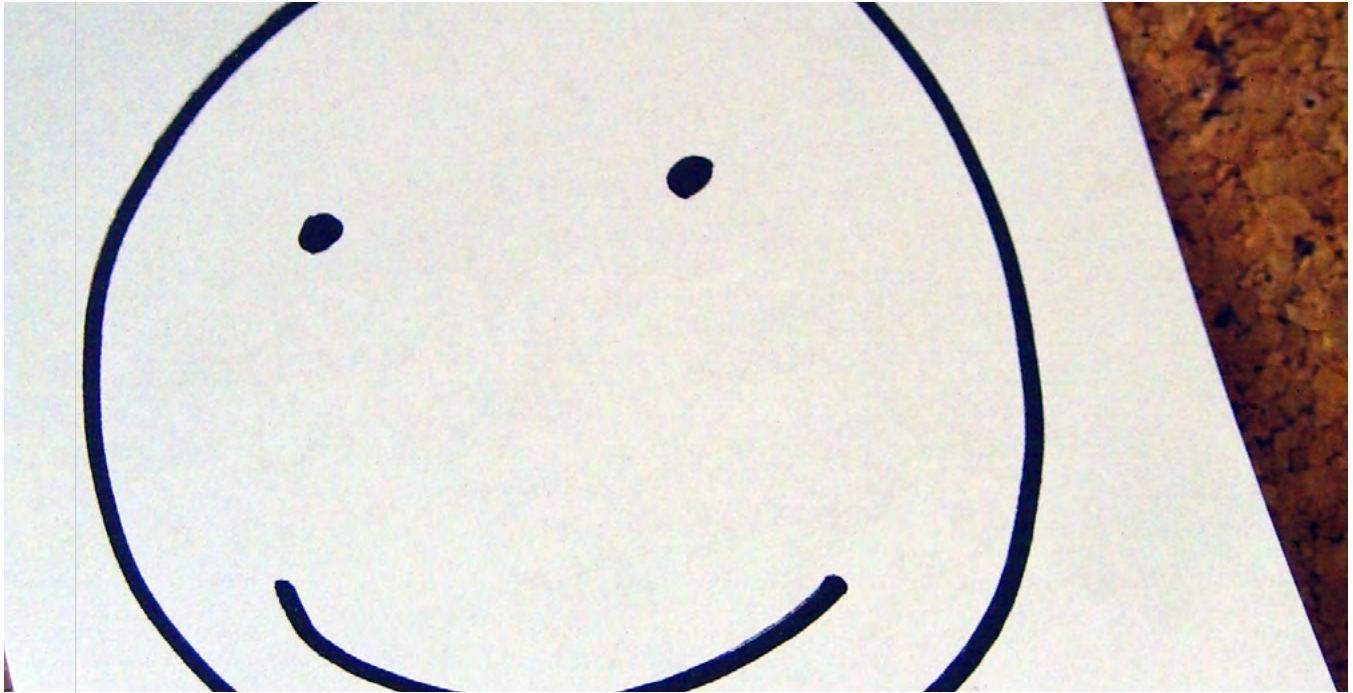
She's walking around in circles trying to find what she lost. She can't find it. She makes a decision. It's the hardest thing she'll ever have to do, but it's her only option.

She gathers her things, all she knows about herself, all that describes her, all that was *her* before she got lost, and puts it aside. She takes what is left. The trail she can't retrace, the hurt of being tired and alone, the pain of losing who she once was, the regrets of a past that haunts her, the torments of never being good enough, the guilt of being everyone's role model except her own, the fear of getting hurt, the little self-esteem she has left... and lights it all. She watches the flames as they grow taller, destroying the pile that was before her.

She walks in.

She opens her eyes; she sees clearly now. She looks at herself; she runs her hands down her body and takes it all in - her neck, her shoulders, her breasts, her stomach, at the piercing that represents this exact moment, her hips, her lower parts, her behind, her thighs, her legs, her feet... She sits back. She starts to examine herself. She looks at her C cup breasts and decides that she loves them. They are proportional to her body, and suit her just as they are. She looks at her stomach; she decides, if it's not flat, it's flat enough. She looks at her piercing. She got it to mark the new her... Looking at it now she sees how it enhances the beauty of her slim figure and she decides that she loves it too. She turns around and looks at her back, the flawless skin that arches just enough to give her behind some shape. She loves it too. She looks at her thighs, then at her arms, then her legs, her hands and her feet... Before she wished that she was thicker, but now she decides she loves herself just as she is, and if she is meant to be thicker it will happen; if not, it won't, and she is ok with that.

She loves herself.



She loves her smile, she loves her laugh. She loves her hair, she loves her skin, and she loves her face, her neck, her shape, her whole body, from her beauty marks to the faint stretch marks. She loves it all.

She starts to think about her inner self. She has character. She has attitude. She loves to laugh and enjoys dancing. She is strong. She is a fighter. She doesn't give up when she has every reason to. Yes, she gets weak, she is human, it will happen, but she realizes she isn't dead. She is important. She is intelligent. She is beautiful. She is gentle. She is kind, but she is no longer looking for acceptance from others. She loves herself.

She is me.

I am human. I make mistakes, but life goes on. I get weak, but I won't stay down. I love myself. I am loyal. I am faithful. I am trustworthy. I am honest. I am straight up. I am loving. I am giving. I am carefree.

I am me. I love me. I love myself enough to let myself live. I am free to be me.

I Am.

AS HE CHANGES WITH THE SEASONS

Thomas Conlan

Student, Social Services

Like the blowing breeze through nestled trees, he walks through life, dirt on his knees. A boy, now a man, finally learned how to stand, and now he flees through this forest of dreams. Alone he must walk, until he finally sees, there is no home outside these trees.

A flower, picked up off the floor, reminds him of what she once wore. She was his core, his lost Lenore, who up and left right out their door, and like this flower, plucked from the floor, she would be lost forevermore.

As he keeps on through these dying trees, he steps on their rustled leaves. Each step echoes pain and agony, unified in a bitter sweet melody. "She's gone", "you pushed her", "what you step on, was once her."

The cold draws breath that only he can see, illusions of what was, and what could be. He carries on with a heart well led, and although he is lost, he is not quite dead. Inside his head, a demon once fed, is the reason for what he once said, "be careful where you tread, for a man made of lead cannot be made to wed". With tears in her eyes, away she fled from this man who bled blue blood. Behind masks of frosted pain, he lifts his eyes and through his breath's cold lies, he sees his love again.

In a floral dress she dances alone. Entranced by every sway and prance, his heart joins her in leaps and bounds. Captured by her sweet, sweet sounds, he can't believe what he's just found. A second chance to love what's lost, like how the sun gently lifts the frost from the ground. The earth does come back, full round again. He has come back to her as a friend, and he will love her until the very end.

BETWEEN MY CONSCIENCE AND REALITY

FB

Student, Social Services

*I started to read between the lines and I know your
kisses feel more like heartbreak than love...*

*Your arms feel more like something that shouldn't
be mine and I know that's a warning...*

*I know you're more like noon while I am a 4 am night
sky that doesn't know what color it should be...*

*I am the promise of a storm and you feel like daylight
and sunshine and things I have never seen...*

*I started to read between the lines and my hands are rough
against yours; they grip everything that's around but they
know yours are a warning so they never touch yours...*

My hands they crave fire yet I know you don't burn...

*Your kisses feel like heartbreak and I don't know how to tell you that my
heart was never mended from my first heartbreak which is totally fine...*

CROSSING PATHS

JP

Student, Psychology Profile, Social Science

They say that everybody we cross paths with in life is set for a reason, but what if that person leaves? What if that path brings us to a dead end? Sometimes you get lucky and meet someone who will change your life forever. These people make you question everything you thought was true, they help build you up and make you believe in the goodness of the world. They bring back hope where hope was once thought to be lost. If ever you're lucky enough to meet one of these people, hold on to them for as long as possible. But what if one day they just decide to leave your life? Disappear in the blink of an eye, with no notice and no explanation?

A while ago, I lost the most wonderful person in my life. My grandma. She saw the world in such a beautiful way. Then one day she was gone. Dead. Now this isn't who my story is about. This story is about the person who saved me and helped me see the light again, after this dark time in my life. I had never met him before. He was a new person who came into my life at the right time. He has one of the most beautiful souls and holds a tremendous amount of strength. When I met him, everything changed. He helped me see the beauty in the world. The emptiness I felt when my grandma left was unbearable and, although I managed to hold myself together, it wasn't an easy task. But with him in my life, it healed a lot. It helped that we were involved. I fell for him instantly and he did for me. It was something that couldn't be explained or understood. It was scary, but you can't control who you fall for.

For a while things started to feel better. Life started to make sense again. We talked every single day. It was the highlight of my days. I never thought that I'd be able to feel this feeling that had once been lost. He helped me find true and genuine happiness. There's a saying that things never last forever and happiness never lasts for too long. Those sayings are true. Four months after meeting this seemingly wonderful person, he vanished. Phone calls stopped, text messages stopped. One second he was talking to me about his plans for his future, and the next he just shut me out of his life completely. At that moment I didn't know what to do. This guy knew that I had difficulty with getting close to people because they have a habit of leaving without notice or explanation. He had once promised to never do this to me. But he did just that. He left, suddenly and without any explanation. At that point I didn't know what to do anymore.

Two months later I received a message that he had gotten involved with another girl. He wanted a second chance and my forgiveness, but how do you forgive an act that is so cruel and unfixable? Now I had two choices: one was to forgive him and try to still be friends and the second was to forgive him, but remove him from my life. It's the most difficult thing to do, to forgive someone who so badly hurt you and let them back in your life. But it is as equally difficult to remove someone out of your life who once meant a great deal to you.



FREEIMAGES.COM/DIEGO MEDRANO

Is it really possible to forgive someone who has hurt you in the cruelest of ways and move forwards? The truth is that once someone has hurt you and broken your trust and heart, things will never be the same. Your guard will always be up. Your heart will want to trust this person again, but your mind knows better. So what is it that I chose to do? In any other situation I would forgive the person and try my hardest to move forward, but for this story, it's not the case. I have chosen to forgive him, but I chose to remove him from my life because first of all, once a cheater is always a cheater. Secondly, he could have left me any other way, a note, a phone call; anything, but instead he chose to just disappear and leave me in the dark. We are on good terms, if we see each other casually but anything more is finished. I can't keep someone who chooses to hurt me by leaving the same way everyone has.

Forgiveness is hard. It's a way of saying that the harm that's been made was in some way ok. But it's not ok. What matters is that you're ok. No matter what it is that has happened to you, choose whether it's something that you can continue looking at in the eyes, but if it's too hard, it's best to leave it in the past. There are a lot of good things that came out from having him in my life, but that doesn't take away the pain he caused. He and I are on good terms and I have forgiven him. I'm just choosing to leave him in my memories rather than my future. This doesn't change the way I see him. He will always be the wonderful guy I met when I needed it the most, but now he's also the guy who hurt me and took advantage of my vulnerability.

FROM FOES TO FRIENDS

SK

Student, Social Services

My reconciliation story begins in 1997 when I was in elementary school and had moved to Quebec from Ontario. I was the new girl and, since I was in grade two, most students had already created their cliques and it was hard to join in. I was considered the outcast and was the target of everyone's hazing. This is when I first met Asha and Sam. Asha was "Miss Popular" and had a large group of friends. Sam was her best friend. Asha would pick on me because we belonged to different religious backgrounds, and Sam would join in to support her friend. This animosity lasted approximately two years. Then, slowly, as we started to mature, we began to see how we were more alike than different. Sam and I were made partners for a group project, and we discovered we had similar interests. We began to talk, and then she invited me to hang out with her and Asha at lunch, where we all finally sorted out our differences. This was the beginning of our friendship.

Before we knew it we had finished elementary, and were off to high school and then CEGEP. Together we were there for each other through ups and downs, school trips, birthdays and even Asha's engagement. If you asked me in grade 2, on that first day of class, if I thought we could ever be friends, I would have laughed at the thought of such an absurd idea. But here we are today, 20 years later, and we are really good friends. I am so glad that I was able to sort out my differences with Asha and Sam, because in doing so I found the most amazing friendship. We have always been there for each other, and none of this would have been possible if we had not reconciled.



FREEIMAGES.COM/RICHARD DUDLEY

Abraham Lincoln once asked: "Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?" I think the answer is a definite "yes". In grade two when I was being picked on, I thought Asha and Sam were my biggest enemies and now they are my best friends. This one decision changed our lives. Now, when I look back, I wonder how different life would have been if we had never looked past our differences.

I am so happy and lucky to have them as friends, and it was only possible because we chose to make peace. We were willing to try, willing to empathize, to see each other's point of view and to sort out our differences. In the end I did destroy my enemies when I made them my friends. None of it was easy because there was a chance of failure; a chance of being hurt and getting rejected, but I am glad I took that chance. I know that a successful outcome is not always possible, because forgiving is easier said than done, and often when someone hurts us, we want to hurt them back. When someone wrongs us, we want justice. But the truth is that without forgiveness and reconciliation nothing is ever settled. The pain may be forgotten but it never heals. One of the greatest powers of reconciliation is that it is able to heal us, because when we make peace with others we are also making our own lives peaceful. In the end it does not matter if someone's efforts at reconciliation succeed or not because, just by trying, they have reconciled with themselves and that is the biggest reconciliation of all.

“WHY, THAT IS HIS JOB?”

Xin Ma

Student, Computer Science Technology

I used to work in a testing company in China, before I immigrated to Canada. There were only 12 staff in the small company which was affiliated with the government. From my first day on the job, my boss told me that the job was easy, but the human relationships were complex. On the surface, everyone was very friendly. However, sometimes, someone did not speak to you anymore without any reason, or even you might not know you had hurt somebody. I thought it was a special case. In my department, my fellows and I were like a family. We usually played games and told jokes. I had always been considering how my boss's comment was wrong. However, finally, such a thing happened to me

It was the day before a national holiday. I had a perfect plan to enjoy my vacation with my friends, so I tried my best to finish all my work. When I handed in my last report to the manager on the day before the vacation, the manager ordered me to do a co-worker's work. I could not understand so I shrugged and asked: "Why, that is his job?" The manager said nothing and my colleague went out angrily and had to do his work in a rush. After that, I felt my fellow worker was very sad, and he and I were like strangers. In the office, he did not talk to me anymore. He did not take part in the same activities as me. When we met in the corridor, he turned his head and looked away. I felt extremely embarrassed and uncomfortable.

I asked the manager for the reason. I knew that my fellow worker had a sick mother in his hometown, who lived alone. At that time, his mother became seriously ill. He had wanted to go back to see his mother, but was private so did not talk to me. Since he considered that we had the best relationship in the company, he asked his manager if I could share his work. I suddenly realized that this was not a tiny thing between us, just like sharing the work. I had indirectly hurt him and his mother. I tried to apologize. He said: "OK, nothing!" The relationship between us did not improve.

I did not want to lose a friend. Although he did not take the initiative to talk to me, I still found some interesting things to say to him. In private, I mailed some health products several times to his mother. Before every vacation, I asked the manager to share his work in order to give him enough time to visit his mother. I knew he never was a narrow-minded man. Gradually, he began to talk with me, and enjoy his happiness. On my last vacation before I gave a notice of resignation to my boss, he and I went to his hometown to see his mother together. On the way home, we drank and talked a lot about how he grew up with a single mother and went to university. I found that his mother was a great mother and had tried her best to take care of her child. I felt more and more that I had hurt him and his mother. I apologized to his mother when I met her and then he



FREEIMAGES.COM/ MARCOS SANTOS

gave me a hug. Since then, we became the closest friends. Sometimes, I invited him to have a dinner on the weekend, and my mother made dumplings for him.

We are still the closest of friends, even if we live in different countries. I have had no time and no chance to go back to see my parents, but he goes instead as a godchild on weekends. I really hope that he can visit me and we can drink together again.

SIX YEARS

MD

Student, Social Services

Many years have passed since we last spoke.

Six, to be exact.

Everyone who hears this always seems so shocked that it's been so long. I, on the other hand, am shocked that it hasn't been longer. I don't even know what you're like anymore.

What I do know, though, is who I am and who I have been and who you were and who we were together. In case you've forgotten, the latter was not pretty.

I may have forgotten exactly how tall you are and what exactly your voice sounds like but I haven't forgotten the tears and the raised voices and the harsh words and the raised fists. I may remember some good times but I remember far more times that were quite the opposite.

Six years have passed since we last spoke. Everyone who hears this always seems so shocked that it's been so long. I, on the other hand, am shocked that it hasn't been longer. I don't even know what having a mother is like anymore.

What I do know, though, is that you were not like the movies or the sitcoms or the Hallmark cards. You were not hugs or kind words or a gentle caress. You were literal bruises and figurative bruises and sirens in the night.

I have not forgotten, but I can say that I've forgiven.

I may have forgiven, but I can never forget.

I may not have reconciled with you, but I have reconciled with what you've done.

I have reconciled with the fact that we cannot reconcile.

Like fuel on a flame we are destined to burn.

THE WORDS UNSPOKEN

TM

Student, Social Services

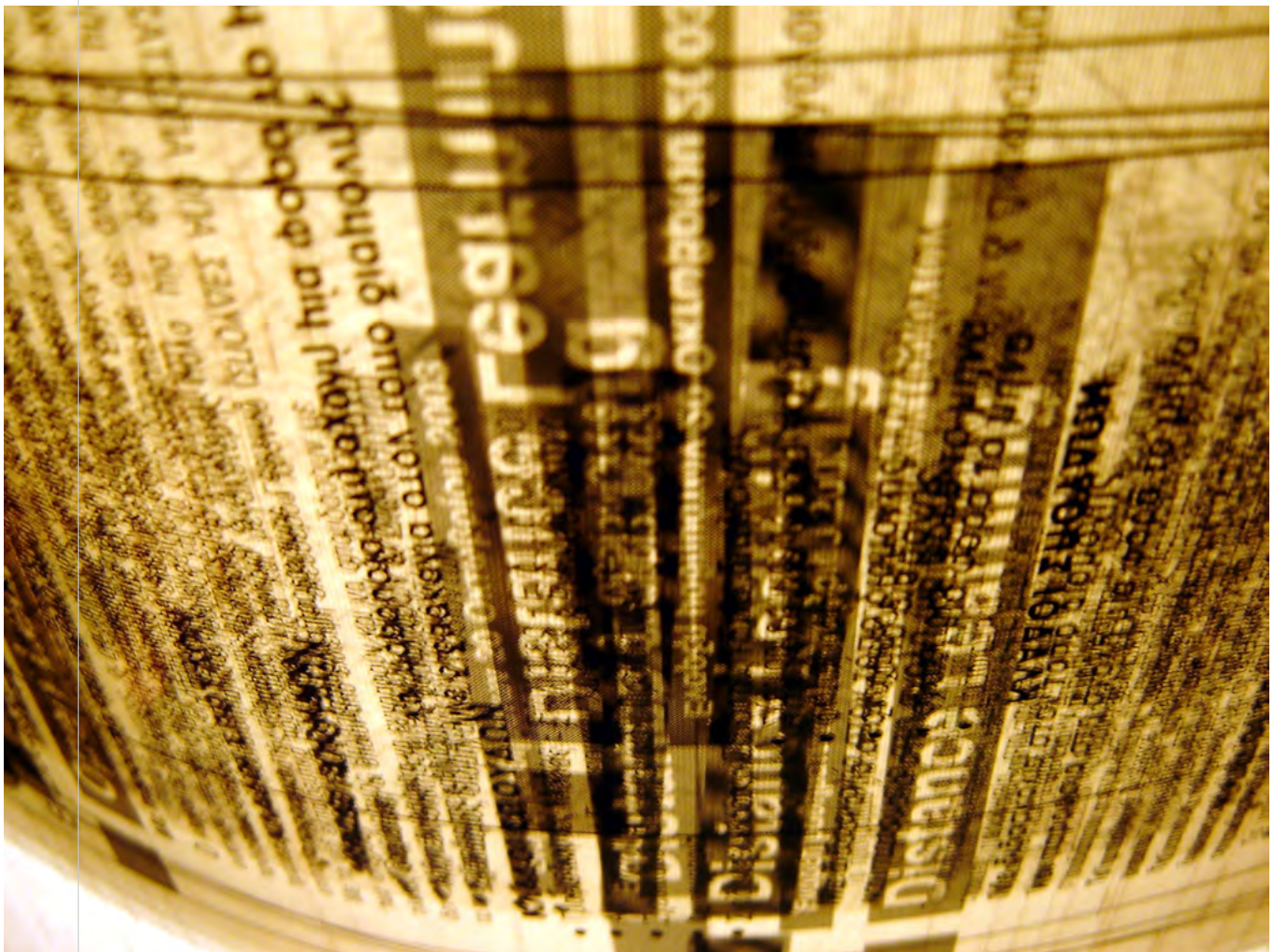
Living in my household growing up wasn't always easy. I come from a really big family so there was always competition to be heard or seen. I lived with both of my parents and my mother worked very hard to support us all. My father, however, didn't work and suffered from alcoholism. He did things around the house but mostly spent his day drinking at home. When he was really intoxicated he would say hurtful things and frequently, for whatever reason, those things were directed at me. He was very strict in his parenting and that seemed to intensify while he was drinking. It got to the point where the simplest thing would set him off on a tirade, listing all the things that I had done wrong. I grew to hate my father for the things that he would say to me, my siblings and my mother; for his lack of financial support; and for the fact that he knew he had a problem and chose to do nothing about it. I eventually stopped wanting to be seen or heard.

In early 2006, my mother passed away and we were left in the care of my father. The suddenness of her passing caused him to drink even more. His verbal abuse ceased a little bit and he practically ignored us all together. I then began to hate my father for not being there for us during that time. By this time I had stopped expecting him to be a good father. The hurt that I was feeling came from seeing the disappointment and hurt in the eyes of my siblings. We had to comfort each other and be there for each other because he just wasn't able to be a father to us. We often times turned to my aunts for support and they gave us everything that he just couldn't seem to muster up in his sorrow. The only thing that would make him happy would be when his friends would come over to drink with him, which turned into something that happened nearly every night. This added another item to the mental list of reasons I had to dislike my father.

By the end of 2007, my father's drinking finally caught up with him, and he was diagnosed with stage four liver cancer. As we came into a new year his health declined quickly and he was soon placed in hospice care. Before the end of summer, my father had passed away. After he passed away, I was left with conflicting emotions. I was sad that I had lost my father, but at the same time I wasn't, because of all the pain that he had caused. I grew angry with myself because I was never able to express the hurt that he made me feel, and because I wanted to know that he was sorry for all of the hurt that he had caused us. I wanted an explanation for his behaviour. I wanted to know that deep down inside he did love us. Most importantly, I wanted to not hate him.

When I was able to recognize what it was I wanted, I walked around with a lot of pain and anger, because I thought that it was too late; he was already gone and I would never be able to get those things from him. I was wrong in thinking this. I began working on moving on from the pain by talking to the people around me,

and by really working on fixing the broken parts inside of me, through the love and support of my friends and family. I began the process of forgiveness in order to heal myself. I will never know why my father treated us the way he did, or why he was an alcoholic. But I don't need that information in order to move on in life, and that was my greatest realization. The pain that comes from holding onto past wrong doings isn't beneficial for your own well-being. I realized that you don't need an apology from someone to move on from your pain. You have to take control of your own emotions, thoughts and feelings and find that apology within yourself in order to move on from things. (BUT) I learned that sometimes you have to accept the apology you never got.



FREEIMAGES.COM/ DORA MITSONIA

MY OLDER BROTHER

Anonymous

Student, Social Services

My older brother and I were inseparable until we both entered high school. Growing up, many believed that we were twins and we took great pride in being so close. True best buds. At this period in our lives it seemed that nothing could ever come between us. It was when I entered high school one year later at the age of 13 that we started to slowly drift apart. I was on all the sports teams and he was not. I was athletic and he was more of a class clown. Our friends started to change and we no longer spent as much time together. Where I was becoming more social due to my involvement with sports; he was becoming more reclusive and anti-social. Although we had no official falling out, our closeness had shifted.

It was around this time my brother started using pot. As for myself, I was much too busy with sports to use pot. Likewise, my friends did not use; therefore I did not have access or much exposure to drugs. I knew he was using but did not know how to approach him about his use. I kept myself busy with sports and never did bring it up with him. Later that same year, his drug use progressed and he started to experiment with hallucinogenic drugs. The fact that I did not intervene still sits heavy with me, as if it was my job to have prevented him from using. If only I had been more inclusive, brought him to parties and introduced him to my friends, then perhaps nothing would have happened.

I was 13 years old when my older brother and best friend developed the mental illness of schizophrenia. I was old enough to remember this change, but not mature or knowledgeable enough at the time to understand why and how this tragic change in his life would unravel and change us forever. I remember seeing the change in him as if it was yesterday; he was extremely irritable and short tempered with the whole family. Not knowing what was now happening to my brother was causing much stress in our household, and things continued this way until he was diagnosed with the illness and eventually hospitalized.

My family knew little to nothing about mental illnesses and felt powerless. After the diagnosis he continued to live with us and I remember how hard it was for him, and for all of us, during those first few months of the illness. It felt as though the illness itself was stealing everything he loved and knew of himself and was making those around him his enemies. During this time it was hard for me to think about anything other than what was happening to my brother. I felt as if I was to blame for his sickness, because I failed to intervene when he first started using [drugs]. How could I forgive myself for not having been there for someone that I was so close to, for so long?



During the next few years I felt trapped. I felt as if I only had myself to blame for what had happened. As time went on I grew sick of blaming myself and turned my energy to blaming his friends for supplying the drugs and God for not preventing this from happening. How could he, whoever and whatever he is, have allowed this to happen? Years have passed since the onset of my brother's illness. Yet I'm still not fully able to reconcile with myself, or with God, for what happened. I do now understand that what happened to my brother was not my fault, yet there are still feelings of guilt that cross my mind when I think of his current state. I feel that I understand the importance of letting go, and I am currently taking steps towards reconciliation. Although the road will continue to be a long and bumpy one for me, it may be this path to reconciliation will lead to the healing I need.

MY ROCK

Breana Prince-Harris

Student, Social Services

Jen, I'm sorry I never explained the real reason I moved out. I kind of just left and left things floating between us, when I should have explained myself better.

You know, you are my sister by blood but my best friend by choice. I can remember so many days we spent doing absolutely nothing, but laughed all day long. I am your beautiful daughter's godmother, and yet we seem to have had a falling out. I wish it wasn't like this.

When we moved in together this summer, I was *beyond* excited to live with my best friend, but I had a hunch that it was a recipe for disaster. I mean, we are sisters... We both have such strong personalities, but we thought it would be good for us. Slowly after moving in, I saw some of our issues surfacing. We didn't agree on everything and it caused some tension between us. Being the hardheads we are, we chose to ignore the tension and just go on with our days, but I guess that just made it worse. It was only two months into the move, but I knew I could no longer live with you, if I wanted you to still be my rock. I need you Jen; but I need us to be on good terms, and not fighting all the time. For months I went looking for my own place, but I never knew how to tell you that I wouldn't be staying. I didn't want to crush our plans to buy a house together. I finally got the nerve to tell you that I would be moving out: closer to downtown for school and work. But I didn't tell you it was because I wanted to bring us closer, as weird as that seems now.

Jen, you've always been my rock. You're my big sister. We may have a ten-year age gap, but I could always tell you anything, and you had advice to give me because you'd done the same stupid things. You were my shoulder when I needed one. I knew that I would ALWAYS have you to lean on. I need that because I don't know how to be without you. I know you're the one who will always be there, no matter what, because we're family and, at the end of the day, that's all that matters.

All I want to say is that I love you, and I am so sorry that I was a jerk. I never wanted there to be so much tension between us. I want you to know that I didn't move out because I was mad at you, but because I love you. I didn't want us to feel like we couldn't look at each other. I needed to leave so that we could be close again; so that we wouldn't resent each other and so we could get back to laughing at absolutely nothing. I hope you understand that.

I love you to the moon and back.

THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

JSJ

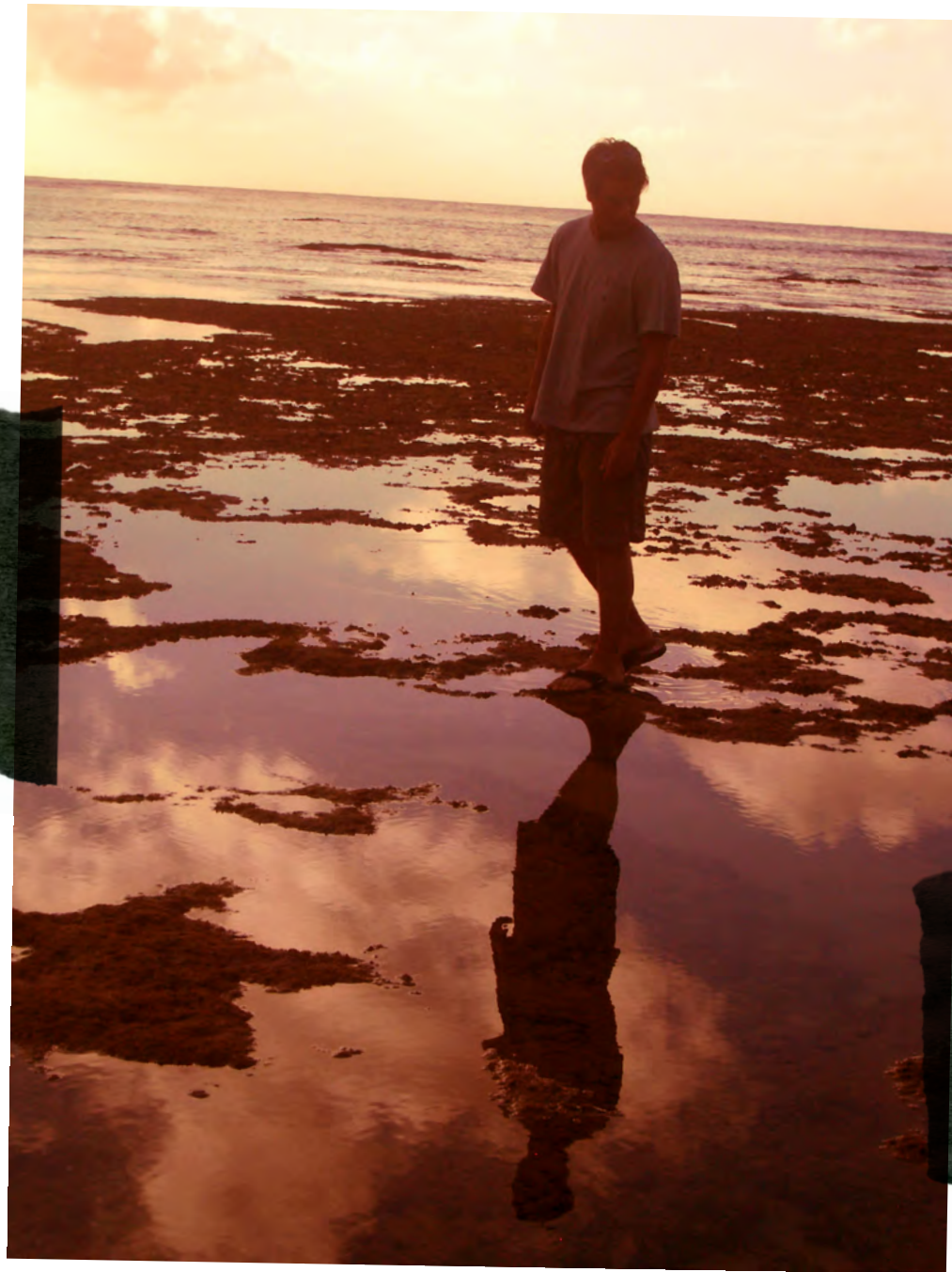
Student, Social Services

Reconciliation is another way of saying reunion or making peace. Some people may reconcile, make up, after an argument or after not speaking for many years. In order to make peace with someone or a situation, one must accept the issues, understand, forgive and look past what happened. In my experiences I have had my share of making peace with friends, family, strangers, and situations. I have even had moments where I have made peace and am in the process of making peace with myself.

The greatest reconciliation moment in my life was when my mother and I bonded after she opened up and apologized for her wrong doings. My mother had not been present during my childhood, from when I was about 3 to 14 years old. She had many issues with drug addictions, crime and homelessness. Throughout my childhood I would occasionally see her around the neighbourhood, which was the only contact we really had. From a young age I knew she existed; I knew she was my mother and I knew she had troubles in her life. During the years that my mother was not present in my life, I would often get sad and cry because I missed her. I wanted to know her and wanted her as a mother.

When I was 14 years old she made some changes in her life and was able to get better with some assistance. She was no longer doing drugs and had a stable home. Although I had had some contact with her throughout the years, it was still rather awkward and uncomfortable between us. She was my mother, yet I didn't know her very well and we did not really have a connection or bond. One time when she came to visit me and my sisters at our grandparents' house, she sat close to me and began to express herself. She was emotional and crying.

She apologized for all the pain she had caused me, all the wrong she had done and how she wished things could have been different. I cried with her and we held each other in our arms. This was the first time my mother had ever apologized to me, and I could tell in her eyes, in her voice, and in her heart that she was truly sorry. In that moment I forgave her for everything, all the pain and trouble she had caused not only to me but to our family. I was able to accept that she had made mistakes, that there were reasons behind the mistakes and that she had now changed for the better. After this experience with my mother I felt relieved, more at ease and at peace with our situation. I was able to look at my mother in a more positive way and we were able to better connect. I am very grateful that we shared this moment and know that it positively impacted me and my mother in many ways.



FREEIMAGES.COM/ ALI FARID

I am a strong believer of peace; I desire and greatly value equality, unity, love and respect. I know that in life there are moments when things are difficult, whether it be a situation or a relationship. I know it can be difficult to accept certain things, to forgive and to move forward. However, I greatly encourage everyone to make peace, to spread peace and to live in peace. We are all given life and time; we must try our best to use our time living in happiness. Peace is such a simple thing that brings such greatness. It is much better to live happy and well than to live a life filled with anger and despair. No matter how difficult and painful a situation may be, there is always an opportunity to make peace. By making peace you allow yourself to rest, to breathe and to enjoy life. Please be kind to others and be kind to yourself.

DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL

Isabelle Richard

Student, Psychology Profile, Social Sciences

I have always been scared of open waters because you cannot see what is underneath you – waiting for you in the dark. That's what it felt like to come home every night. I just didn't know what would be waiting for me.

I spent a lot of my childhood and adolescent years clinically depressed with two alcoholic parents. Although my mother was very high functioning, my father was abusive, aggressive, and violent. I grew up anxious, insecure and withdrawn because of this. I was not happy for a long time. And I was also very angry.

I was angry about being criticized and never feeling up to par. I was angry that I was constantly the target of my father's misplaced frustration. I was angry he could not see how much he hurt me, either. My father was a proud man, set in his ways and could never admit he was wrong. I was left with all this anger I didn't know what to do with. I had no outlet. I was not allowed to express myself, so I turned my anger inward. I started to believe he was right about the things he said. Maybe I really was stupid. Maybe this really was my entire fault. This, in turn, just created more ire. I felt he was ruining my life. At times, I wanted to die.

And so when my father had his heart attack two years ago, I didn't feel anything. How horrible was it that I could lose my father and not be affected by it? I was embarrassed and ashamed for feeling the way I did, but I felt so much resentment towards him. It's hard to feel empathy for someone who hurt you. I felt shame for not loving my father like every other little girl. I felt shame for wanting different parents. I felt guilty for harboring all these feelings. After all, wasn't he still my father? Did he not still love me in his own way?

He'd been horrible to me all my life, but I needed to forgive him. Despite all these feelings of rage and acrimony, I was ready to forgive him, because I understood it was what I *had* to do in order to start mending our dysfunctional family. I had to forgive him to move on with my life. I could not keep holding onto the things that had been done to me all my life. But how can you forgive someone who never apologized? How can you forgive someone who never thought they did you wrong? I was waiting for an apology that would unfortunately never come. This left me to wonder: where could I go from here?

It was clear I could not simply give up on my vision of reconciling with my father. So I decided that meant I had to reconcile with myself. I had to forgive *him* in my heart, and forgive *myself* for feeling the way I did in the past. I decided to make my peace with it.



FREEIMAGES.COM/ VALENTINA DEGIORGIS

I had, for most of my life, understood why he acted the way he did. That was the type of family he was brought up in as well. Although I never believed this excused his behavior, it helped me find the ability to forgive him within myself. It helped me find the power to reconcile the image I had of my father in my life. I am still learning to try and carry forward, and to forgive as much as I can, in myself as well as others, for it's what I believe will make me free to live my life the way I should: in harmony and peace.

“IT SEEMED LIKE HE WAS NEVER THERE”

AD

Student, Psychology Profile, Social Sciences

It seemed as if he was never there

He isolated himself from his family

Why didn't this stranger care?

To me, it's just a vague memory

He was indifferent; he ignored us

I didn't know why he acted this way

He was frustrated and would cuss

I didn't know that he wasn't okay

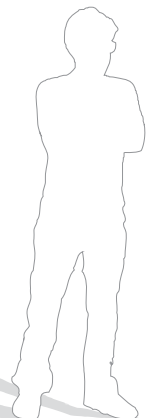
He got some help and removed his mask

I tried to get to know him a bit

better with time. It was not an easy task

At times, I felt confused, lonely and sad

I learned to forgive since he's my dad



A MOTHER'S LOVE

MJC

Student, Social Services

I have been told a mother protects, loves, empowers, and boosts your self esteem. A mother is where one should take refuge when the world starts being cruel. A mother should reflect the ultimate expression of love. A mother should be your hiding place. A mother's love should not be hidden under a cloak of indifference. A mother should not be the source of all your dysfunction. A mother's love should not make you perpetually doubt yourself, making you think that you are imperfect. Since the tender age of 10, I was made aware of my imperfections. I felt imperfect because of my dark skin. I felt imperfect because I was overweight. I excelled in school yet I never felt confident. The source of all my negative awareness:

MY MOTHER.

She would gently try to chemically scrub away the ugliness that was my dark skin. She would remind me everyday that I am too "fat". "She loves me" she says, she is doing it for my good.

"Overpower. Overprotect . Overlove .

Too much of everything kills."

There is a point in life that you realize that you are broken. You realize that the mother who was supposed to protect you is overprotecting you to the point that you are suffocating. It is her way or nothing at all. It doesn't help that your rebellious self wants to fight so much against it, and stand up to her, but that SHE overpowers you.

The result of all this is that I feel that some inner part of me has been killed. It is that part of me that feels powerless, that always feels inadequate, feels less than, feels that she doesn't fit, feels that she will never belong, feels that she is not worthy of being loved; that part of me has learned to relinquish power, and just give in. There is a part of me that is not simply broken, but has died.

Forgiving someone who has murdered the very best part of you requires humanity. It requires you to be able to extend a piece of your humanity to them, tap into your broken self and understand that they themselves were broken.

It requires humanity to understand that my mother chemically scrubbing away “the darkness” is the product of a society that doesn’t think that “dark skin” girls are beautiful, a society that is cruel to “dark skin” girls, and thus her only wish was to protect me from that. She is part of this society that engrained into her that fat girls don’t get married, and that one has to be married in order to be happy. She is a VICTIM of a society that taught her that children have no voice, that as a mother she has to make the best decisions for her child and protect them at all costs if she wants to be worthy of being called a great mom. It takes humanity to understand that maybe her choosing to send me to a foreign country, was her way of protecting her children from all the insecurities that her country of origin had. It is better for your children to be alive, far away, than at risk. It takes humanity to understand that a broken society can only breed broken people who break other people.

I am still trying to shelter the best part of me that has been left intact and from which my humanity grows. However when your own humanity is tarnished by so much hurt, it is difficult to extend it to someone else. It takes healing and sometimes healing takes time. We must learn to forgive in order to truly heal, and sometimes you simply cannot heal. You forgive but cannot forget. You *forgive* to have peace. You *forgive* in order to keep society’s brokenness away from you. You *forgive* because you understand that we all are human and we falter. You *forgive* because you deserve to give yourself a second chance to make YOU right. You *forgive* because holding on to the pain only leads to destruction.

I may never experience the ultimate mother-daughter bond, but I have known PEACE. I am on the path of HEALING. I am FIXING ME!

And this is why despite all the pain and hurt, I have chosen to FORGIVE...

MOVING FORWARD

MS

Student, Social Services

My family was dysfunctional, to say the least; we never spent time together, never ate a meal together, but despite all this, we loved each other. Therefore, when a social worker came into my home and told my mother they were considering placing me in child protective services, we banded together like never before. I was never a neglected child, was never abused, but something was definitely lacking as I grew into a teenager. But, at that age, I enjoyed my overly permissive mother and the liberties she allowed me, and ignored her dependence on alcohol. So I truly felt attacked when a stranger came into my home and tried to take away from me what I thought, at the time, was a great arrangement.

The day the social worker showed up at my house, I was not in school and my mother was asleep on the sofa. My mornings were usually left undisturbed, so it came as quite a shock when someone came knocking at my door. I peered through the slit of my mailbox, and heard a woman announce she was from the Batshaw Youth and Family Services. I had never encountered a worker from there, but, in my neighbourhood, visits from them were not uncommon and they were essentially considered enemies. I waited silently by the door until she left, then woke my mother up to tell her what had happened. In retrospect, her response was unimpressive, but, at the time, it was reassuring. She told me together we can make them go away.

Now I figured I had two options: either I would stand *with* my mother or *against* her. I was beginning to see what was wrong with my situation, but did not want to leave my mother or my freedom behind. To me, my choice was clear: prepare for battle. As sad as that sounds, unifying with my mother even in the most unfortunate of circumstances was good enough for me, as long as we were together. Truth be told, we did work well together and were able to conquer our "enemy," because the case was closed soon after.

I would like to say that things got better from that point on, but they didn't. My mother continued to drink and I, in turn, continued to follow my wildish teenage desires. I did not understand the negative aspects or "casualties," if you will, of the war I fought, such as my high school career. I fought for what I thought I needed, but really I was blinded by my desire for absolute freedom, at an age when constraints were necessary.

Thinking back now, I feel as though the system did fail me, even if that was the outcome I'd fought for.

It did not take me long to realize that I had made a mistake, but, even then, that did not motivate me into reaching out for help. Instead I grew further apart from my mother, and, in the end, we broke ties altogether. I was full of resentment towards her and could not understand how she chose her addictions over me. My mother's addiction is an extremely personal issue to me, and, although I understand what drives her addiction, it is not easy to move past this. Now I believe the onus is on her to acknowledge her actions, and begin to heal as an individual, so we can begin to heal as a family.

A decade has passed, but it feels like a lifetime since I have connected with my mother on an amicable level. As I grow in my personal and professional life, I am beginning to understand my mother's illness and am now making steps to allow her back into my life and the life of my family. The road to reconciliation is a long and complex one, but is attainable if both parties are open to communication, and willing to let go of the past to move forward with a positive future. I know I am ready and open to this, I can only hope my mother is too.



DE SÉPARATION À RÉCONCILIATION

Philippe Lachance

Student, General Social Sciences

Tout le monde connaît l'histoire classique de la fille qui quitte son copain pour sortir avec son meilleur ami. C'est une histoire qu'on voit souvent dans les films et qui arrive surtout lorsqu'on est jeune. Et bien, c'est exactement ce qu'il s'est passé avec mes parents. Du jour au lendemain, j'ai appris que mon nouveau beau-père était un des meilleurs amis de mon père. Ça nous a tous surpris, mon père le premier. Il est inutile de vous dire qu'ils ne sont pas restés amis très longtemps après ça.

Étant mes parents, mon père et ma mère n'avaient pas vraiment le choix de se parler fréquemment et de continuer à rester en contact. Mais ça a été très difficile pour mon père d'apprendre qu'il venait de perdre la femme qu'il aimait et, du même coup, de perdre un bon ami. Est-il possible de rebâtir une relation de confiance avec un vieil ami même après ça? Il était dans l'intérêt de tous d'essayer.

Bien sûr le temps est un élément de taille dans ce contexte, car on dit que le temps arrange les choses, mais c'est plus facile à dire qu'à faire. Au début, il était impossible de penser que mon père et cet homme pouvaient un jour se retrouver dans la même pièce. Il se sentait insulté, humilié, perdu et détruit. Il était très dur pour lui de passer devant la maison de ma mère pour venir nous chercher, mon frère et moi. Il ne se faisait pas à l'idée de voir son bon ami occuper la place qu'il occupait il n'y a pas si longtemps. Il rentrait à la maison et était dans tous ses états. Un soir, je suis rentré d'une pratique de basketball et je l'ai vu lancer des livres, des photos et des objets dans le feu de foyer. C'était tous les cadeaux et souvenirs qu'il avait reçus de son ami. C'était très dur à regarder et je ne savais pas quoi lui dire pour le consoler.

Chaque chose en son temps était la méthode à employer. Il ne fallait pas brusquer les choses et il fallait laisser le temps faire son travail. Bien sûr les premières années ont été plus émotives, mais mon père et ma mère sont restés en très bons termes. Ils se parlaient presque tous les jours et je les remercie beaucoup d'avoir fait les efforts qu'ils ont faits pour qu'on reste une famille unie. Il n'y a rien de pire pour des enfants que de voir ses parents se chicaner sans cesse et de se crier par la tête. Après les premières années, mon père semblait être passé par-dessus la séparation, mais il était encore bouleversé du bris de confiance et de la trahison de son ami. Il a fallu beaucoup de temps et de courage à mon père pour accepter la situation et recommencer à établir un lien avec mon beau-père.

Les premiers contacts furent des petites discussions dans l'entrée de la maison, ensuite lors de nos fêtes il y a eu de plus grosses discussions, et finalement des soupers complets. Ce qui a beaucoup aidé mon père à passer à autre chose fut la rencontre avec ma belle-mère. De recommencer une relation avec quelqu'un

d'autre l'a convaincu que la confiance existe toujours. Il est dur, mais pas impossible de rebâtir une relation de confiance qui a été ébranlée ou dans ce cas, complètement détruite. Le temps fait sûrement une bonne partie de la guérison, mais il est évident qu'il faut travailler sur soi-même et développer un grand sens du pardon. Il est aussi important de noter les efforts de mon beau-père. Il aurait pu ne faire aucun effort pour stabiliser la situation et la rendre la plus facile possible. Quoique je n'ai jamais été témoin d'excuses formelles de sa part, il est clair qu'ils se sont parlés et qu'ils ont discuté de la situation. Des efforts des deux côtés sont nécessaires pour qu'un accord soit établi et qu'une solution soit élaborée.

Mon père a réalisé qu'il était beaucoup mieux pour son bonheur et celui des autres membres de notre famille de pardonner à son vieil ami et d'essayer de rebâtir une relation avec lui plutôt que de simplement l'éviter et de ne plus jamais avoir de contact avec lui. C'était la meilleure décision pour notre futur et notre environnement familial. Il a fait preuve de beaucoup de maturité et de générosité. Tous ses efforts ont mené à notre dernier souper de Noël, où tout le monde de ma famille incluant la famille de mon père, de ma mère, de ma belle-mère et de mon beau-père ont célébré tous ensemble pour le réveillon. Évidemment, ce ne sont pas toutes les situations comme celle-ci qui finissent de cette façon, mais il est possible de reconstruire une relation et de pardonner un geste ou une erreur commise.

NOT READY FOR CHANGE

EHB

Student, Social Services

Reconciliation is never easy, we have to admit our mistakes and forgive others for theirs. We can sometimes escape the talking about the issue part and try to get over it and just live as if nothing happened. However, it only lasts for a while until the issue bursts again, leading you to actually address the problem. Conflicts and issues occur all the time even in families. Reconciliation is not easier between family members. For me, it is actually worse. It seems so much easier to forgive or get over a mistake a friend did than someone in my family. A friend is known not to be perfect or it is known that you would have conflict with your friends, but with your family, I feel it is harder to get over with.

My mother and I had issues for as long as I can remember. We have a conflictual relationship. We can talk to each other and see each other, however, not often. Living with my mother was like being part of WWII. We just can't seem to like getting along. We have different opinions on several things and we express our opinions loudly with blocked ears to the other's point of view. I also found myself having trouble accepting her opinion and even taking it into consideration.

In our program, we learnt to agree to disagree, I can apply this theory with friends and other members of my entourage but for some reason I have to get my point across with my mother and will not agree to disagree. We have tried so hard to make things work, and our best solution was getting some time apart from each other. I love my mother, and always will, but I love her most when we are apart. We cannot co-exist that is for sure, and we can talk but only of certain subjects. There are few subjects that are like grenades; do not address them, or if you do get ready to explode in an argument.

I have learnt to live this way with her and I have learnt to accept it and feel good with that situation. I also believe I create this situation in a way. I am so used to this relationship with her. I am so scared that, if I start believing everything is fine and I put my guard down and tell myself we now have a perfect mother-daughter relationship, that, if we ever fall back to old patterns of hard arguments, it will hurt me! I protect myself by saying that my mother and I do not get along because when we don't it feels like normal.

I would deeply love to actually reconcile with my mother and learn to accept her opinions and forgive her for the things she did. I would love to be able to accept those things and move on, but I feel I am not quite ready yet.

The day I will, I would have to sit down with her and address every subject that we disagree on and just let them be. I would have to learn that her point of view is valid for the simple reason that it is hers. I would have to accept that she did her best and that she went about things the way she thought would be better for her children. It might not have been the best ways, but it is all she knew. I have to learn that we are different, yet alike and that I should focus on our positive similarities rather than focus on our differences. Reconciliation is hard, because I have to admit my mistakes, and I am not there yet. I do not quite see them as clearly as I would if I was ready to cross that step.

I know my story is not a reconciliation story, meaning that it did not occur, and it will probably not occur in the following days. It is a reconciliation I have been avoiding all my life, and writing this made me realize that it could bring positivity into my life. However, it also made me realize that I am not ready to forgive yet. I am not ready to sit down and listen. I am still angry and hurt for some things and I need to understand those on my own and be ready to accept everything that might be said in order to approach the reconciliation. I know one day we will get there, and I know one day I will be ready to agree to disagree with her, but it is not today, and for now I am fine with this situation.



ANRAMEJONA (1995), OIL PAINTING

56 X 46 INCHES

Raymond Nardoza

Graduate (2014), Commercial Photography

I am a man of few words and painting has always allowed me to express my true feelings without saying a word. As a new father in 1991, I naturally shifted to the abstract art form as it empowered me to express better the awakened inner emotions that are tied to being part of this new family unit.

This oil painting is entitled "Anramejona" and it represents my own metamorphosis as part of the meshing the many cultures that make up our family. I was born from a Franco-Scottish-Amerindian mother and an Italian father. I married a woman of Anglo-Irish-French-English ancestry. This painting represents my own self-reconciliation in terms of creating a family unit that is made up of all these different and somewhat opposing cultures including the two solitudes of Quebec.

Anramejona (1995)

ENDURING REGRETS

AA

Student, Social Services

I often wonder what the relationship between my mother and grandmother would be presently if they had put aside their past differences. According to my mother, my grandmother is yet to take ownership for her part in an incident that occurred between her and my grandmother's husband over forty years ago. For years my mother has been harboring feelings of anger, hatred and resentment towards her mother. I have watched as these negative emotions have weighed down on their relationship like an anchor preventing them from moving forward. On more than one occasion I have heard my grandmother cry herself to sleep and I know the cause to be the regret that she has carried with her for more than half of her life.

From infancy, my mother was raised by a trusted family friend in Trinidad while my grandmother went to Canada to pursue a better life. After my grandmother married, she sent for my mother and it was here that their issues began. My mother felt uncomfortable with her stepfather who she felt touched her inappropriately and who at times became aroused in her presence. When she confronted my grandmother about this, she did not react in an appropriate manner and instead accused my mother of trying to steal him. She was then kicked out of the house at the age of sixteen by the accused molester, and without any other family here besides a younger half-brother she was very much alone. Some years later, when my older sister was a toddler, she told my mother the way a child would that he had touched her inappropriately. When my mother confronted my grandmother about this, she was very dismissive about it. This cemented the divide between my mother and grandmother that has lasted for many years. My mother, being a generous woman, allowed my grandmother to come live with our family when she was having difficulty making ends meet, but the close proximity has not helped them to reconcile. Their relationship has proved to me that time does not heal all wounds.

The burden that my grandmother bares, weighs on her. My mother's bitterness constantly reminds my grandmother of the damaged relationship between her and her daughter. As she approaches the late stages in her life the guilt and regret remain a stumbling block in her life. Pride clouds our judgment and acts as a poison that prevents reconciliation. My mother has always said that she would forgive my grandmother if she apologized. However, humbling oneself and taking ownership of one's mistakes requires a great deal of humility. A genuine apology requires selflessness. You cannot have one without the other; they are inextricably linked.

THIRD TIME'S THE CHARM

Valentina Hernandez

Student, Child Studies Profile, Social Sciences

For as long as I can remember my dad and my grandfather have always had a pretty complicated and tense relationship and from what I've heard before it has always been this way. Back in the 70's my grandfather was a pretty wealthy man. He had this company of food products that was very "popular" in Colombia. My grandfather wasn't necessarily rich but he had enough – and more – to provide my dad, my grandmother and the rest of my aunts and uncles a very good quality of life. My dad's family certainly wasn't perfect; they had ups and downs like any other family, but things started to get complicated when money and "success" started occupying every single aspect of my grandfather's life. He began to drink excessively and host parties almost every single week-end. The wealthier he became, the bigger his social circle got as if his money was the honey and his so-called "friends" were the bees. He would leave home for weeks or even months without even saying a single word and the only reason for him to come back was to give my grandmother the money she needed to support the family. I remember asking my father why no one in the house would question him and his actions, and the answer was that my grandfather wasn't really the type of father you could approach or rely on; in fact, everyone was pretty afraid of him.

Circumstances definitely went downhill when my grandmother found out that my grandfather was cheating on her with not only one woman but two. For many years, my grandmother had to deal with his infidelities, humiliations and mistreatments and, even though she knew her marriage was irrevocably broken, she never really saw divorce as an option. Although I can't really comprehend how she was able to bear so much I somehow understand her decision, since back then a woman with children and no husband was considered to be a bad influence for society. As time went by, my grandfather started spending his money on gambling and bets. His new addiction and the expensive lifestyle he was living led him to lose everything he had. As if things weren't bad enough, my grandfather decided to leave my grandmother and the rest of the family. With no money at all and a bunch of things to pay for, my dad, who was the eldest son, became the new "man" of the family. I do believe that the main reason for my dad's resentment and anger towards my grandfather was that he wasn't really there when he (and they) needed him the most. Yes, he did provide everything they physically needed, such as food, a house and clothes, but that wasn't necessarily what they wanted. At the end of the day, no money can ever buy affection, trust or happiness, and above all things it will never buy love. My dad and my grandfather lost contact for many years; he would occasionally call my aunts and uncles to ask about him and, although they didn't really talk, my dad would always give him money when possible.

Before my family and I left Colombia (September 2007) to come to Canada, my grandfather unexpectedly showed up at the airport. No one ever really expected him to be there, but he was, and somehow we were all

happy about it. When it was time to say goodbye, my grandfather wished us all good luck and then hugged my dad for a few seconds; it wasn't necessarily the most sincere/genuine hug but it was better than nothing.

Our first months living here in Canada weren't always easy. My mom and dad had a lot of trouble trying to find decent jobs that would provide for our family. After a few months, my dad started sending money to both my grandmother and my grandfather; however the amount of money my grandfather was receiving wasn't enough for him. He always wanted more and more, and that's exactly where problems between my dad and my grandfather started to rise again. No matter how much money my dad would give him, he was always unsatisfied. Full of frustration and anger caused by my grandfather's ungratefulness, my dad stopped sending him money. This of course enraged my grandfather and once again they stopped talking to each other.

After eight long years, when we finally got our Canadian citizenship, my family and I returned to Colombia. We visited every single member of our family and we were all incredibly happy at seeing each other after such a long time; however the celebration was incomplete since there was one person missing. We spent a whole month in Colombia and, before coming back to Canada, my dad decided to leave all the tensions and conflicts behind and took the strength and courage to visit my grandfather. When we arrived at his house, my grandfather's second wife opened the door. We waited downstairs for him to come down, but after waiting for more than 20 minutes, his wife finally informed us that he didn't want to talk to us and that he didn't want to see my dad. We left the house completely surprised and disappointed. On our way back to the place where we were staying, we were completely quiet and the atmosphere in the car was a mix of sadness and anger. To be honest I've only seen my dad sad and discouraged on a few occasions, and this was one of them. The four of us didn't really expect to receive a warm welcome from my grandfather, but never in a thousand years would we have imagined he was going to react in such a rude and disrespectful way, especially after 8 years of absence. After that day, we didn't really talk about what happened. I guess it was something we all wanted to ignore and forget.

Things gave an unexpected turn when in February (2015) my dad received a phone call from one of my uncles informing him that my grandfather was very sick. According to the doctors, his heart was strangely growing, which would likely lead to cardiac failure. The news clearly affected my father and, although he really wanted to contact my grandfather, the different memories and feelings of his past kept holding him back from doing so. One day he woke up and without hesitation he called my grandfather. For the third time again he decided to put his pride and pain away and give my grandfather another chance. My dad is currently making plans to bring my grandfather here so he can visit us and at the same time get to know this awesome country. We don't know exactly how things will turn or how he is going to behave once he's here but we all think the "risk" is worth it.

A few weeks ago I randomly asked my dad how he was able to not let his anger, frustration and pride control him and he answered, " I'm not only doing this for your grandfather, I'm also doing this for myself and my inner peace. I first need to forgive myself in order to forget my dad. I know your grandfather hasn't been the best man in the world, but he's still my father and I wouldn't forgive myself if one of these days he leaves this world with me knowing that I could have done more to reconstruct our relationship. I know it won't be easy to do, and I'm somehow afraid things might not work again, but at some point we all need to be courageous and humble enough to forgive and forget... no pain or resentment lasts forever"

PRESSING THE BUTTON

Greta Hofmann Nemiroff

Faculty, English, Humanities & The New School of Dawson College

She was a college teacher who enjoyed generous and understanding relationships with her students. He was a student in her mixed media class who by mid-term had failed all his assignments. She was an ample woman approaching retirement; he was a wiry young man with acne. He spoke English with a faint accent which she couldn't place; his name was ambiguous.

One day she asked him to remain after class so she could speak to him about his low marks in the course. When she asked him if he realized he could fail the course, he nodded silently. As she usually did when students were so passive, she inquired if everything was all right in his life. To her surprise, he began to sob. He was very lonely, he said. He lived alone in a 1 ½ in a rundown section of the city. He hardly knew anyone even though he was in his final year. He was German, he said, but since his mother was a citizen he was now studying in Canada. Since the next class was entering the room, she suggested that they continue their discussion in her office the next day. As they stepped into the corridor, he reached into a small bulky package he was carrying. His mother had sent him some sweets from Germany, he said and offered her a soft candy shaped into a bright green frog. "Oh," she exclaimed, "A Froschl!" as she popped it into her mouth. That was how she let him know that she knew the word for a "little frog" in German.

During their meetings over the next weeks, the student's story emerged. He had been whisked out of Germany to Canada because he was in trouble with the police. He had started seeing a girl who had previously dated one of the Turkish men in his town. One day the girl's ex-boyfriend and a group of his friends had set upon him and beat him up badly. He hated the Turks, he said, claiming that they were dirty and stinking, that they didn't even try to belong in Germany or to learn the language properly, and that they lived on welfare provided by the taxes of good hard working Germans. Sometime later and in retribution, he had beaten and badly injured a Turkish man who had been able to identify him. There was an outstanding case against him. He supposed that sometime he would have to go back to Germany to face the court. He spent most of his spare time, he told her, at a local gym learning an "extreme martial art" that could be used to kill people.

Since he was such a soft spoken young man, the teacher was so shocked by the virulence of his language that she began research in the German press where it became clear to her that there was strong prejudice against the Turkish minority in Germany. At first she remonstrated unsuccessfully with the student, citing statistics and giving him prints of newspaper articles from the more liberal German press. She talked to him about human rights, about the contributions of the Turks to the German "economic miracle" and about the dangers of prejudice. In response he dreamily observed that he wished he had a button he could press to kill

all the Turks in Germany. He would press that button, he said calmly, if he could. She felt as if she had been punched hard in the chest.

"Seventy years ago, it would have been me you were killing," she told him. He knew, he said, they'd studied the Holocaust in high school in Germany. It wasn't the same, he insisted, although he couldn't explain why killing the Turks was less egregious than killing the Jews.

Their last meeting was about his final project. Under her attention, he had caught up with his assignments and was now passing the course. She felt choked by the silent anger accumulating within her during their conversations. It was never to be expressed; she was his teacher and must be accepting of him she thought. She began to dread meeting with him. Her Jewish parents had immigrated from Germany before the Nazi victory in 1933. Relatives had ended up in the gas chambers, and she knew that had her parents not immigrated, she would have been slaughtered as a small child. Much of her childhood had been spent in the company of refugees who recounted terrifying reminiscences of the savagery enacted upon them by their neighbours, strangers, and political regimes. Their accounts built the armature around which her moral core was constructed.

Moved by her conviction that all people were equal and worthy of respect, her entire life she had been an activist in various social movements. She would steel herself to be objective and non-judgemental when the student spoke about the Turks; she thought that was her role as a teacher. As well, she could comprehend the vulnerability of a slight young man who felt compelled to prove his strength to a particularly savage "man's world."

One day he told her that he had some white supremacist acquaintances at the college with whom he liked to go for a beer and trash-talk who should be purged in Canada. It was then that she had to admit to herself that she could no longer be a "neutral" participant in their conversations without being implicated in his views. Since she could no longer tolerate conversations with him, she accompanied him to the counselling office where he was assigned a counsellor. They parted there on friendly terms, and the student eventually earned a B in her course. She had been badly shaken by his views and felt relieved to be free of their conversations.

The last time she saw him was on the street, and his face lit up when she greeted him. He said that he had told his friends that he would no longer continue their racist conversations. She was gratified, feeling that perhaps their conversations had been worth her pain.

She often wondered if he had returned to face the court in Germany. A few months later she received an email from him, saying that he had reviewed his position regarding the Turks in Germany. He had come to the conclusion that indeed the Turks deserved to be driven out of Germany and killed if necessary. Germany had to be purified of negative foreign elements. He wished her a merry Christmas.

She was bereft; she did not know what to think or do. He was a fragile and lonely young man, but he also had murderous racist thoughts and had once even acted upon them. She had always believed that conflicts and disagreements could be mediated with good will, but now she could not imagine a space where their opposing values could be reconciled. She regarded her student's views as evil and embedded deeply in his intransigent being. Strangely, however, while she was despairing over his violence, she found herself remembering the sweet lime taste and soft texture of the candy, the Froschl, he had once offered her.

THE OSKAR GROENING TRIAL: A WITNESS' IMPRESSIONS

Judith Kalman

Graduate (1974), The New School of Dawson College & author of The County of Birches

On April 21, 2015, Oskar Groening, age 93, a German former SS-Unterscharführer who was stationed at Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, was put on trial for accessory to murder in 300,000 cases for his role in the tragic deaths of those interned at the camp during the Second World War. Groening's trial may be the last great Nazi war crimes trial in history. On April 29, 2015, Judith Kalman testified at this trial on behalf of her half-sister Eva, who was gassed upon her arrival at Auschwitz. She was six years old.

These are her reflections on the experience:

When I first heard about this trial from my sister Elaine Kalman Naves, it was just before Christmas 2014. I had no idea what a gift it would turn out to be, but I did have a strong immediate reaction. I knew I should be there, even as an observer. It felt as if a unique opportunity had fallen from the sky, an eventuality I would never have dreamed of, and that I'd be a fool not to rise to whatever it may offer or require of me.

I didn't meet Thomas Walther, lawyer for the co-plaintiffs and the force behind bringing this case to trial, until the end of January, just before my husband John and I were bound for a month in Florida. Because of this imminent departure, I couldn't attend the gatherings of the co-plaintiffs from Toronto. Everything happened quickly. On my return, I spent a couple of weeks preparing my testimony. I had no sense, however, of what to expect beyond presenting this statement. I vaguely imagined a couple of dinners with the other co-plaintiffs; evening walks with John around Luenenburg; perhaps an evening or two in Hamburg after court had adjourned for the day. I worried somewhat about how I might feel surrounded by German people and the German language, having heard it mostly in American war movies as sharply barked commands. Nothing short of this trial would have induced me to visit Germany. I have not objected to my children's visits to Berlin, but out of respect for my parents' suffering at the hands of the country, and the senseless murders of their families, I would never have chosen to set foot on German soil.

Somehow, for me, Oskar Groening was the least important character in my experience of the trial in Luenenburg. He was the hook that reeled us all in. Groening, netted finally by the justice system, was the negative force that drew together our galaxy of lawyers, co-plaintiffs, justices, and press. But it was our interactions that held sway for me, the sound of our voices telling our stories, and the meaningful conversations between strangers who had little time or patience under the circumstances for small talk, that made this such a significant and

seminal event. What impressions have I come away with? That Germany is a country seeking to change the culture that had produced the Nazis. It not only wishes to distance itself from that sinister period; it wants to fundamentally change the values, perceptions, and ways of coalescing as a society that led to it. I am grateful to have been included in this process, and made use of towards this constructive end. What I've gained is personally invaluable.

To quote my husband, proximity is the best antidote to prejudice. Every German person we met during the twelve-day stay – our lawyers, the security detail at the court, the judges and prosecutors, members of the German press, city officials, hotel and restaurant staff – made us feel welcome and cared for. Cared for and cared about. I think this was the point, that even if justice can't be served at this late date; if justice could never have repaired the enormity of the crimes committed; at least justice – German justice – finally cares. Period. It cares to go through the exercise nonetheless, for the sake of the innocent dead, and the sake of the survivors, and the sake of the national soul which will not forget and continues to grapple with its history of perpetrating genocide. I have never felt more intensely listened to by those who wished to converse, and those who took notes, and those who pinned a microphone to my collar. This invitation to speak about the past, its legacy, its mark upon my psyche and its brutal stamp on the lives of my parents, released an unburdening that has left me more open to the world and freer in my engagement with it. It seems unlikely, at the age of sixty-one, to undergo so formative a change. Yet bringing this trial to court was itself an unlikely venture. Its benefits in my case surpassed all expectation.

FUTURE: **SYNONYM** **OF PRESENT,** **AND PAST**

Meghri Doumanian

Student, Modern Languages Profile, Creative Arts, Literature and Languages

Past, Present, Future. The past is gone, never to be altered, and the future is unwritten; we are left with the present. Past, Present, Future. The present that we live will become history in fifty years. The present will become the past, in the unwritten future that will soon become the present. The next generations living in their present, which will be, for us, the future, will think of our present as the past that is gone, never to be changed. Past, Present, Future. The three words complement each other as they merge into one another.

I am here because of a dark past filled with atrocities and struggles that made me and my nation who we are today. Yet freedom from the past is rendered impossible. "But not everyone cares what happened in Armenia a 100 years ago" were the words I heard spoken to me in the month of April, during the week of the centennial commemoration of the Armenian Genocide.

Yes, I am a young Armenian-Canadian, and I could not be any prouder to be Canadian, but I also hold my Armenian heritage and culture dear. Being Armenian, as much as being Canadian, made me who I am today: a person willing to initiate peaceful gestures, a person who wants to launch projects that will commemorate the past, because history forgotten is history repeated. Growing up, I was taught to honour the lost lives of 1.5 million Armenians, who suffered in 1915 the first genocide of the 20th century. It became a tradition to go to church and light a candle on every April 24th, on the anniversary of the Armenian genocide. As I grew older, I realized that there is much more to honour than the lives snuffed out during the Genocide. I drowned myself in research to understand why any other nation would want to hurt my people, my nation. Then, I asked about my own family and found out that, on my maternal and paternal sides, my ancestors were heroes who had survived the Genocide. There, at that point, is when it hit me personally. The Armenian Genocide is considered a forgotten genocide; I mean, after all, as Adolf Hitler said, "Who now remembers the annihilation of the Armenians?"

Who indeed, except for every person with the slightest trace of Armenian blood in his or her veins, who still talks about it, and wishes to keep the memory alive?

Now, after 100 years, the Armenian Genocide is still not universally recognized, even if, in 1985, the United Nations found that the event meets the criteria for the definition of genocide and therefore is one of the genocides of the 20th century. I, a descendant of survivors, do my best to raise awareness and fight for justice, peacefully. As a child, it was very hard to carry the weight of the Genocide on my shoulders. A genocide haunts, it is a burden, and its memory is a heavy debt to pay. Over the years, listening to inspiring teachers, hearing about the murders of great minds like Hrant Dink--a Turkish-Armenian editor and journalist who was murdered because of his views about the possible reconciliation between Armenians and Turks--my world was turned upside down. Dink's past changed not only my present and future, but the future of every single Armenian. I came to realize that my pen (or keyboard) is more powerful than any foul, destructive weapon, more powerful than hatred and denial, and my words and ideas can change the future of generations both younger and older than me.

As a graduating student at Dawson College, I decided to do my Integrating Activity project on the three most talked-about genocides of the 20th century: the Armenian Genocide, the Holocaust and the Rwandan Genocide. I decided to examine their impact on the cultures and language of the victims. As a part of my project, in April, I hung up a banner that read, "I remember the Armenian Genocide" from one of the College's mezzanines. I explained my project to the college authorities and I suggested that I would like to hang a Genocide remembrance banner, and I was finally able to put up the banner three months after seeking, and receiving, approval to do so. However, the banner was only up for a few hours, before it was taken down, by order of the college authorities. It did not upset me, but I was disappointed. I did not understand why an educational establishment in Quebec, a province that has already accepted the Armenian Genocide as having indeed happened, would take off a remembrance banner. After speaking with the director, I understood that one single banner can spin off into many conflicts by dissenters. However, I cannot run, hide from, or silence my past, nor can, or should, anyone who wishes to remain both true and sane. Wherever I turn, whatever I do, it is both behind and ahead of me, this genocide. My name, my very Armenian name, reminds me of it. Each time someone calls me, or I say my own name, it is right there, a province in current Armenia. If not for the Armenian Genocide, I would not be living miles away from Armenia, where I was supposed to be born and grow up. Of course it is not fair, and taking off the banner was heartbreaking because it felt as if years of hard work to keep my culture alive and honouring my ancestors were simply repudiated, like that, in one brief instant.

It took me a couple of weeks to accept the decision made to have my banner removed, but let's face it: that is what everyone before me has faced, and what everyone working to bring to light the Armenian case faces every day. I could not initiate an Armenian Genocide Remembrance movement within the College, but one of the victories of this experience is that the incident did not lead me to be the cause of further conflict. Quite the opposite: I turned to my laptop and let my words convey what it felt like to face such a situation.

I of course accept that the Armenian Genocide happened. I do not live in denial, and I do not ask why it happened anymore, for I have all the answers, whether I like them or not. My ancestors – when they lived their own, lonely, dark present yesterday – wrote an unforgettable future for us, which is now our present. Their present, our past, resulted in a different and incredibly courageous future. That future is my presence on this Earth, along with that of my fellow contemporary Armenians, all of whom are busy writing a strong present for themselves, for us, and hoping that the mysterious future will take a different, more just, more open-minded, and more compassionate turn.

LEARNING ABOUT FORGIVENESS

Lily Ieroniawá:kon Deer

Student, North-South Studies Profile, Social Sciences

Sometimes people walk into your life and end up teaching you something that will stick with you for the rest of your life. These moments are rare and often gain significance as time passes. Kelly Running Wolf was a man who I only met once, but the encounter is something I still think about.

I met Kelly when I was in grade 10. I had just started at Laval Liberty High School (LLHS) that fall, and was still adjusting to not being surrounded by Haudenosaunee (Ho-de-no-so-ne -- more commonly known as Iroquois) culture, Mohawk language, or content regarding Indigenous peoples in the curriculum. When attending Kahnawake Survival School (KSS, located on the Mohawk reserve of Kahnawake, south of Montreal) for two years prior to my attending LLHS, I took for granted the fact that I was surrounded by my culture in my courses.

My first few months at Laval Liberty High School were difficult because it was so foreign to me. It didn't take me long to notice the lack of Indigenous peoples and specifically the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) in the content of my courses. The only time there was mention of Indigenous peoples was in grade 10 history – and there was nothing about us after European contact. It made me feel left out and created a need to learn more on Indigenous peoples' history.

I began to search the internet and began reading about Indian Residential Schools. Indian Residential Schools were part of a government agenda to “kill the Indian in the child”. These “schools” were open from the late 1870s to 1996, and were run by various religious denominations. Indigenous children were forcibly taken from their parents, their homes, their community and their culture. Parents were threatened with jail or fined. If Indigenous children were to speak their mother tongue or practice their culture, they would be abused. Sometimes it didn't matter if a child followed the rules – mental, physical, and sexual abuse was experienced by numerous children. English or French was taught, and the religion of the church running each school was deeply ingrained in the “education”.

Back in elementary school in northern Ontario we had a few speakers come in to speak about Indian Residential Schools, though it was only in high school that it began to sink in. I was at a point in my life where I was

becoming more aware of the issues that Indigenous peoples faced in Canada, and felt angry. I didn't know what to do to express my feelings of hopelessness about what had happened in residential schools and their lasting effects. I didn't know what to do with my anger at the churches, the government, and at the current education system that didn't require Indian Residential Schools to be mandatory content.

A teacher of mine saw a potential leader in me and brought me to meet Mr. Johnson who was in charge of Advanced Student Leadership. After telling him about my anger and desire to create change, he suggested that he and I meet a friend of his – Kelly Running Wolf

IT WAS THEN THAT I MET KELLY RUNNING WOLF. It was February 2012. We met in Mr. Johnson's office, the three of us. After the introductions, I told Kelly about my anger at what I had read on residential schools and my desire for others to know about this unfortunate piece of history. He listened TO ME EXPRESS MY ANGER and then told me his story. Kelly had gone to a residential school, and so had his sister. His sister had never come home – she was one of the over 4,000 Indigenous children who never came home. He had later tried to find out where she died and where her remains were located, but found no answers. He didn't go into much detail, but I could tell this had affected him to the core.

He continued with his story, and ended up speaking about what he was presently doing. He spoke about how he was part of the United Church, and had mixed Indigenous spirituality with the ways of the United Church. He started a healing/talking circle that brought together the two religions. I was confused, and mad. I asked why he wasn't mad at the church – after all they were contracted out by the government to run these "schools". He told me that he had forgiven the church a long time ago – and that though it took time – it was important. Kelly told me that in order to heal him from the pain he faced he had to forgive the ones who had caused it. I internalized this wisdom, though remained angry. Mr. Johnson's suggestion that I educate the students of LLHS on Indian Residential Schools was supported by Kelly. We agreed to meet at a later date and parted ways.

In May of that year, Kelly Running Wolf (Calvin Richard McKay) passed away. Mr. Johnson, another student, and I attended a celebration of his life at the United Church that he had attended. I could not express to people why Kelly meant so much to me even though I had only met him once. I still cannot. Some people understand, and others do not.

I continue to work on reconciliation within myself – reconciliation with my anger towards myself, the churches, and the Canadian government. I feel guilty at times with myself for feeling angry towards the key players in Indian Residential Schools because I did not experience firsthand what went on in those schools. I feel guilty because, if anyone has the right to be mad, it is the survivors. The survivors experienced so much pain, and are justified in any emotion they have. I then remember Kelly's words, how he could not heal without forgiving those who caused him pain. Sometimes I stop myself to apply this wisdom in my personal life.

It is a constant struggle between the anger and wanting to forgive – though I am on a slow but steady path up that mountain. I realize that not only do I have to work on this as an individual, but we, Indigenous peoples, have to heal collectively. Indian Residential Schools was a plague that took the lives of over 4,000 Indigenous children, damaged the spirits of the survivors, and continues to impact the generations following the survivors. The antidote to the pain, anger, and impacts of residential schools is reconciliation. In order for Indigenous peoples in Canada to heal from this pain, we must start with ourselves. Once we have healed as individuals, we can eventually heal as a people. Non-indigenous people also have to work at reconciliation through educating people about this dark part of Canadian history and its continuing effects on Indigenous peoples, and listening to the survivors – those who want to share and those who do not.

THE ISFAHAN BLUES

Ivan Freud

Faculty, Religion

I nearly jumped out of my seat as the bus driver hollered 'Isfahan!' Having slept poorly on the night drive from Shiraz, I nonetheless moved quickly, though half-asleep. I got off the bus, gathered my backpack, caught the attention of my newfound travelling companion, Kenzo, hailed a cab, and headed for the comfort of a guesthouse hoping for no more than a hot shower and a clean bed.

Halfway to our destination however, anxiety gripped me as I realized that I had forgotten my recently acquired Givson, an Indian handmade knockoff of the original American Gibson guitar, in the overhead luggage rack. Although I had not paid much for the guitar, relatively speaking, it was surprisingly light, played well and had the stylish look of a vintage Gibson. I was proud of my guitar. It was cool and I was very happy to have it. I'd even developed a slogan for it: "Gimme some Giveson!" As soon as I realized that it might be gone, I tried to turn back immediately but Kenzo and his oft-suffering stomach begged to be taken to the guesthouse first. Though frustrated, I conceded. Getting to the guesthouse, I checked in, dropped my bag, and headed straight back to the station.

Somehow imagining our ride from the bus terminal to have been far faster than it had actually been, I decided to walk back and save some Riel as well as the challenge of having to negotiate taxi prices in Farsi. Walking rapidly under a fast rising sun I began to realize that the bus stand was far further than I had estimated. Realizing that the chances of ever seeing my guitar again were slim at best and fleeting with every passing moment, I began to walk even more hurriedly, the air getting hotter and the fear of never recovering my guitar growing colder in my guts.

Finally arriving at the bus station soaked in sweat and pretty frantic, I headed right for the information counter, hoping with half-conviction, that somehow my guitar would be there. Having developed only the most basic of language skills in the three weeks since entering Iran, I had no choice but to resort to sign language, mime and my infantile Farsi in the quest for my instrument, repeatedly going between mimicking playing a guitar and shrugging my shoulders while parroting "Guitar! Where?" Unfortunately, I was unable to effectively communicate my loss to the young woman at the information counter. Distraught and disappointed, I took a seat in the crowded station, barely noticing the many passengers, sitting, rushing off, the usual hustle and bustle of life, as I began mourning the loss of my guitar. It was then that the young man sitting next to me, turned and inquired as to whether I was all right. What a nice gesture, I thought, how kind, before realizing that he had inquired in English.

I quickly enlisted his help in communicating my predicament. This time she got it. She looked to her right and pointed to the nearby glass doors suggesting that I should exit and wait on the platform. I asked my newfound friend to ask her if my guitar was there, if it had been found, but all she would do as a response was point towards the doors. I hoped that I would somehow find my answers out there.

Unfortunately, my newfound friend had to catch his bus. I thanked him for his invaluable service, wished him well on his travels and stepped out from the cool, air-conditioned terminal and into the glaring midday sun. Not only had I stepped out into the heat, I had also stepped into the role of fool, as I found myself being sized-up by a bunch of jeering men lead by one of the drivers who had driven us that night. Though I did not know what they were saying, I knew what they meant. The side smiles, chin shrugs, and insinuating intonations made it clear that they took me to be a genuine moron. Realizing that my guitar hung in the balance, I chose to keep my cool, to grin and nod, to act rather than react, and to go along for the ride in the hopes of somehow recovering my guitar. If only my helper had been able to stick around. If only I spoke the language. If only someone would simply give me my Giverson!

The bus guys put out their smokes, crushing the butts underfoot, and started boarding the bus. The driver turned to me and signalled that I should do the same. Wait a minute, what? Why did I have to get on the bus? I just got off the bus! All I want is my guitar! Just give me my Giverson and everything will be all right! The only answer I got was get on the bus. So I did.

Within seconds the bus was pulling out of the station and I realized that we were heading back to Shiraz! Getting progressively more nervous I tried to have the bus driver understand that I was not interested in returning to Shiraz! Again he motioned for me to sit down and shut up. Again, I did.

We started out of town and we began going into the desert. Thankfully, after about fifteen minutes, the bus pulled over. The back-up bus driver, who had also been with us on the previous night's drive, jumped off the bus and motioned that I was to go with him. Again I began gesturing, playing my air guitar and asking, "Guitar? Where?" When out of the blue, the driver seemed to remember something, showed me his index finger, meaning for me to wait a minute, went to the back of the bus only to return with my empty guitar case in hand. "Where is the guitar?" I exclaimed from the deserted sidewalk while pointing into the empty case. The driver simply shoed me away pointing towards the back-up driver who had already begun walking back towards town.

Almost immediately, he began giving me sidelong looks while muttering under his breath and poking me in the chest. He was apparently berating me for having been stupid enough to lose my instrument. I tried to keep my cool through one poke, then another, but after a few too many pokes, my childhood scraps came back to me and I responded with a forceful two-handed shove and with my finger pointing in his face, said loudly: "I may have been dumb enough to forget my guitar, but you stole it!" He looked surprised and backed off. His attitude had changed abruptly as he turned and continued towards town. Having retrieved the guitar case was something, at least I was on the right track, but with no guitar in hand and finding myself with the choice of following him into town or going off into the desert, I chose to follow.

We soon found ourselves at the front of the door to a home, one amongst many on a row of attached dwellings. He brusquely gestured that I wait outside and went in, slamming the door behind him. I stood alone for no more than a few seconds before the door swung open. Suddenly, my beloved guitar was shoved back into my chest. Though grateful for having my guitar back, I was still pissed at his having taken the guitar and he was pissed at having to relinquish it. The anger between us was palpable.



Whispering obscenities under my breath, I grabbed my guitar and, not taking the time to put it into its case, stormed off as the driver once again slammed his door behind me. Having walked a few, fuming steps, I finally stopped to store my just-recovered guitar in its case. As I did so, with one knee on the sidewalk, and the rhythm of my breath slowing, I calmed down. As I calmed, I realized that I was filled with foul feelings - anger, resentment, and ill will. Was that the kind of person I wanted to be? Was this the kind of world I wanted to live in? I was in Iran as a traveller, a visitor who, as such, recognizes and affirms not only the inherent humanity of each person but also the great value of life itself in all of its myriad manifestations. Then Mahatma Gandhi's directive came to me: 'Be the change you wish to see in the world.' Well, what kind of change did I want to be in this world? For one, I wanted to be a change to peace. I wanted to be a builder of bridges. I wanted to bring joy into the world. I wanted to help rather than hinder. I wanted to be of value. Was I living up to my vision of the world? No, I was not.

I returned to the driver's home and knocked. As he opened the door, I could see that he was surprised to see me. He was then taken even further aback by my invitation for tea. "Cha, cha" I said while mimicking drinking tea from the small transparent Iranian tea cups while pointing to the teahouse I had noticed at the end of the street. He refused shyly but I insisted. We stood there for some time with my inviting him to tea and his resisting. Finally he asked me to wait, and for a third time that day closed the door behind him, though without slamming it this time, and went inside. In less than a minute, the door reopened and I was invited in.

I immediately noticed how open the room felt without furniture as we sat on a gorgeous rug that filled the room. I was introduced to the driver's sister and her two lovely children. As it turns out, I had been invited to lunch.

As his sister prepared the food, the driver and I drew cartoons with the children. Although I tried avoiding their requests, I finally, after some insistence, acquiesced and agreed to play guitar for them. The thing is, I was not a very good guitar player. I had only begun playing two years before and apart from my own sorry compositions, the only two covers I knew were "All Along the Watchtower" by Bob Dylan and "Honkey Tonk Women" by the Rolling Stones. So I played them. Too shy to sing, I did them acoustic with straight bar chords, with neither embellishments nor leads, a little twangy and likely out of tune. I sensed the driver's disappointment at my obvious lack of skill. What must he have felt, after all we had been through, to find out that I could barely play! Fortunately, I knew that I wasn't very good, and though embarrassed, I knew that my great love for music and my joyful perseverance in playing would someday reap their rewards. More importantly, however, was the joy I felt in being there, in that moment, appreciating the warm company of this beautiful family.

Still sitting on the carpet, the sister brought out a magnificent grilled chicken and saffron rice dish that had my eyes bulging and my stomach growling. We ate heartily while continuing to communicate through drawings and mime, all the while sharing much laughter and camaraderie. By the end of the meal I felt as one does among friends – welcomed. It had been nearly five years since I had seen my own family and the feelings of familial love that I was feeling moved me deeply. I somehow felt at home knowing that I was far from it.

We exchanged addresses, I thanked them for the wonderful meal and the heart-warming hospitality, and I promised the sister that I would send her the eczema skin care products she requested. The children hugged me as I left and the driver and I exchanged hearty handshakes. Walking away, I was filled with a sense of pride at not having given in to pettiness, for having had enough faith in the power of human kindness to try to heal the wound I had inflicted rather than allowing it to fester any further. I felt good about having been the change I had wanted to see.

I hailed one of the shared taxis that pick up different people on the same route. I jumped in the back filled with as strong a feeling of being a human being as I had ever felt. I gave the cabbie the name of the guesthouse, which I thankfully remembered, and we set off. The taxi hadn't driven very far before a young woman wearing a customary black burka hailed us from the sidewalk.

The driver pulled over and she stepped into the cab citing her destination. As we pulled away from the curb the driver turned to her with squinting eyes and a telling smile speaking in those telling tones that could only mean flirting. Blushing, she looked down and shared only her shy giggles.

Watching this all too human interaction from the back seat I reflected on how a potential feud had been avoided and how friendship had been installed instead; how a perception of otherness had been replaced by a feeling of fraternity. What also struck me was how people truly are people and how love, regardless of language or land, colour or culture, was universal.



RECONCILIATION STORIES:

A

**DAWSON
PEACE
PROJECT**