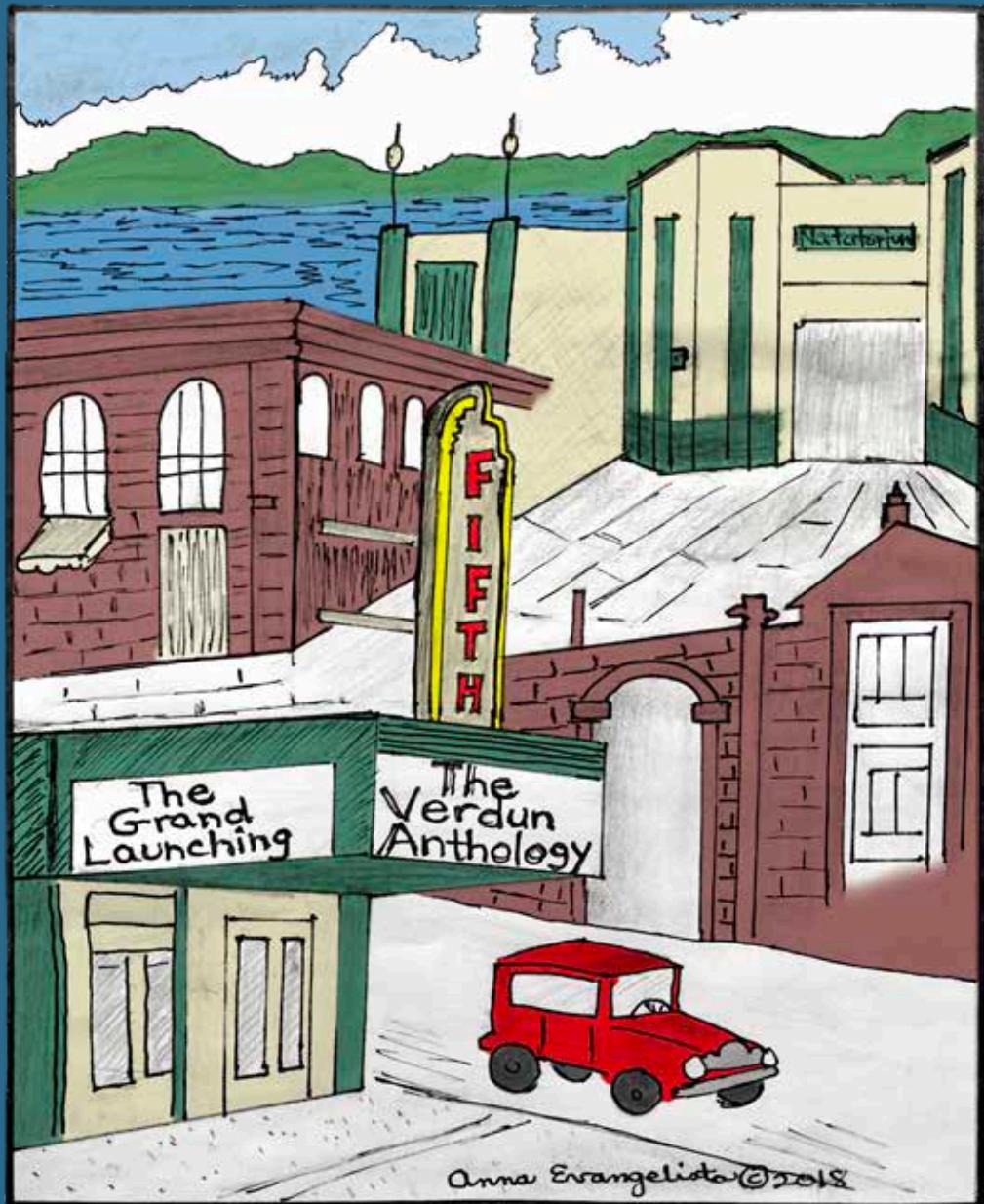


# VERDUN STORIES





*This project was made possible thanks to the New Horizons For Seniors Grant. The grant is intended to positively impact the lives of seniors as they help to make a difference in the lives of others and in their communities.*



*Content for this magazine was workshoped and collected in the community by the organizations Literacy Quebec ([literacyquebec.org](http://literacyquebec.org)) and The Suspicious Fish ([suspiciousfish.org](http://suspiciousfish.org)).*

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*Cover art by Anna Evangelista; photo above by Elisabeth Badertscher*

## From the Editors

Verdun was founded in 1671 (Source: Wikipedia). It is bordered by waterways along its south and north shore...

Wait, that's a terrible start. Sorry, we're new at this.

Which is a funny thing to consider. What we mean by that is the fact that something like this, a magazine about Verdun from Verdun shouldn't be something new, should it? We think something like this should already be at issue number 85. Now before you go digging into any kind of symbolism here on the number 85, don't. We just threw the number out there: see how new we are at this.

But seriously, this sort of thing really should have been around already. Our little chunk of the Southwest is heavy with talent, cultural diversity, history and tradition. With that in mind we also think that Verdun as a community is strong, but could be stronger. We think we could get a little closer and share a bit more about ourselves in an attempt to add still more shine to our day to day interactions. In trying out our hand at publishing this magazine, Verdun Stories, we think celebrating said diversity, and taking the time to appreciate the voices and talent that reflects this precious piece of the South West, could be a good way to go about doing just that.

In compiling the content for this issue, we tried to focus on the diversity of our community. We asked for and received contributions from a wide range of ages, cultural backgrounds, and points of views. We know we're still missing a lot (we're a few sentences in, but we're still new) but we also know that connecting our community members is a forever process. What we also realized and were pleasantly surprised by was that we were actually getting a good portion of the contributions by just being out and about. Some of the stories, poems, interviews, features, etc...that you'll read came to us by just running into folks on the streets of Verdun or sharing some public transportation. We got to talking, they got to talking. We asked if they had anything to share, they said sure. We really liked that, and in case you weren't one of the folks we were lucky enough to bump into, we hope to do so the next time. Maybe we'll get to talking and you'll say sure to the same question. We'd really like that too.

Oh, one last thing before you go page flipping: even if we don't bump into each other, there is another way to share. Keep an eye out for information regarding future submissions and don't hesitate to contact us at any time with a story to tell.

Until then, we hope you'll enjoy. We hope you'll want more.  
Your neighbors,  
Verdun Stories



Photo by Elisabeth Badertscher

## INTERESTING STORY by Briani Wu

It was a spring morning in 1898. There were two young blonde girls who were about five and seven years old. Their names were Lucy and Charlotte.

Lucy and Charlotte woke up, got ready, and went downstairs to eat breakfast with their parents. After they ate, they decided to go out. They put on their shoes and out they went.

Lucy and Charlotte always played together. They would play hide and seek, tag, and other games.

Since Lucy was the oldest sibling, she would always let Charlotte go first. She would look after Charlotte even when her parents were not watching them.

Charlotte was the youngest and she looked up to her sister. Charlotte always followed Lucy wherever she went.

They kept playing until the sun went down. Their parents called them in and they went inside. The girls ate dinner and went upstairs to change into their nightgowns. ▼

## NOVEMBER RIVER by Jeffrey Mackie

November on the river Is grey but  
Christmas will come again  
Jesus will be born again  
Presence will be given

The future is writing dirty words  
On clean sheets  
I've got a printing press  
And ancient crinkled pages

There is no ice  
So, you cannot walk on water this year  
The water is cold but it flows  
And your love is not landlocked

You copy out pages of the Bible  
To see if you have the nerve  
To change anything  
That has been written

Your thoughts chase each other  
In the evening gloom  
But they come back when called  
You have them well trained ▼

# DAVID LEFNESKI

David Lefneski is an ordained minister with the English United Church in Verdun. The congregation is also responsible for a community space in Verdun called The Verdun Southwest Mission, which works to service and support members in the Verdun anglophone community. David generously gave us some time to discuss his experiences and thoughts on the community.

**Where are you from originally?**

Guelph, Ontario

**Was it always your intention to work in the ministry?**

No, but I felt a vocational call in my teens. By 15 or 16 I would say I felt a sense of vocation.

**Let's jump ahead a few years. When did you first begin your work in Verdun?**

I began in 1998.

**Congratulations! You're celebrating 20 years in the community. Have you had a moment to reflect on this anniversary?**

I would say I did last fall as I began a new chapter in my journey. I found myself reflecting on this shift in my twentieth year and asking the question, 'is it a matter of staying or shifting?' I think you ask yourself many different questions during this time.

**Did you know anything or have any prior connection to Verdun before coming here?**

My only connection which I didn't realize until much later was that I did make a visit to the Douglas Hospital when I was 18. I had come for a visit from Peterborough with Father Jerry Grant, a redemptorist priest from



The Pentecostal Assembly of Canada Bible College. He had been a chaplain at the Douglas Hospital there before. I didn't even know I was in Verdun at the time.

It wasn't until 1998, 20 years later, that I realized I had been here once before.

**In the years you have been here, how have you seen the community change?**

The biggest change is the status of our English population. When I arrived here in 1998, Anglos in Verdun accounted for the second highest represented group. We are now third.

**What are some of the successes you've witnessed or been a part of?**

I would say that the success I've seen here is connected to what we just discussed regarding the shrinking Anglo representation in Verdun. Where I have seen success is through the resiliency and what you might call, 'a gutsiness' of the English speaking community in this new reality we live in.

Another thing I would consider to be a success is connected to memories I have of some of the people we have buried over the years. I have witnessed great emotion and much love from our community members who have lost loved ones. I think a part of what creates so much emotion and love is that there are very deep roots that have been planted here in Verdun.

**Okay, what kind of challenges have you encountered?**

Again, this is connected to Anglo representation slipping to third in Verdun. I think our institutions have gotten weaker. Our local schools, CLSC, hospitals...I have seen them decline over the 20 years I've been here.

**And how do you feel we've dealt with this challenge?**

This is complicated. We have become more inclusive as an English language community, which is positive, but in doing that we have also made it more challenging to preserve our English community's access to the same services and their sense of identity.

**Can you give an example?**

Well, one would be that whenever we have events or any other kind of community initiative we always provide the information in both languages. This is not the case for French organizations that will not offer information

in English. We are almost too successful in trying to be inclusive and this is leading to further challenges for our English community to be better served.

To give you an example: we hold a community Christmas party at the Southwest Mission every year. This year we had roughly 90 people attend and out of the roughly 90 who attended, our English community members made up the third largest group. This is not a bad thing when it comes to opening ourselves up to our entire community, but there are some other anglo groups I know of that restrict events like this to only their members.

***So you would never consider offering your services to only anglos.***

No, how do you remain a neighbor to your neighbors?

***We hear you play a pretty mean violin. When did you start playing and what led you to implement in your services?***

I started when I was ten years old. My sister played. I chose it over the piano, trumpet, and other instruments because you can put it in a case and off you go.

I play less now than I once did, but I believe music is a great link for community. A carol during Christmas time can reach anyone be it someone from either the English or French community.

***Last question: in your opinion, how can a community like this continue to move forward and get stronger.***

The only way forward is together. Some of our English institutions need to realize that we need to be more unified. Some groups will focus more on maintaining their own identity, and they might believe that they can be sustainable on their own. What some might not realize is that when we act together our individual visions and goals might change, but they will still optimally service the same community. For example, when we apply for specific funding to launch or maintain specific services, we have a better chance to receive said funding and more of it when we all put our names on the application.

*Thanks again for all your time, David. ▶*

Four Poems by  
**ANDREW JEFFERSON**

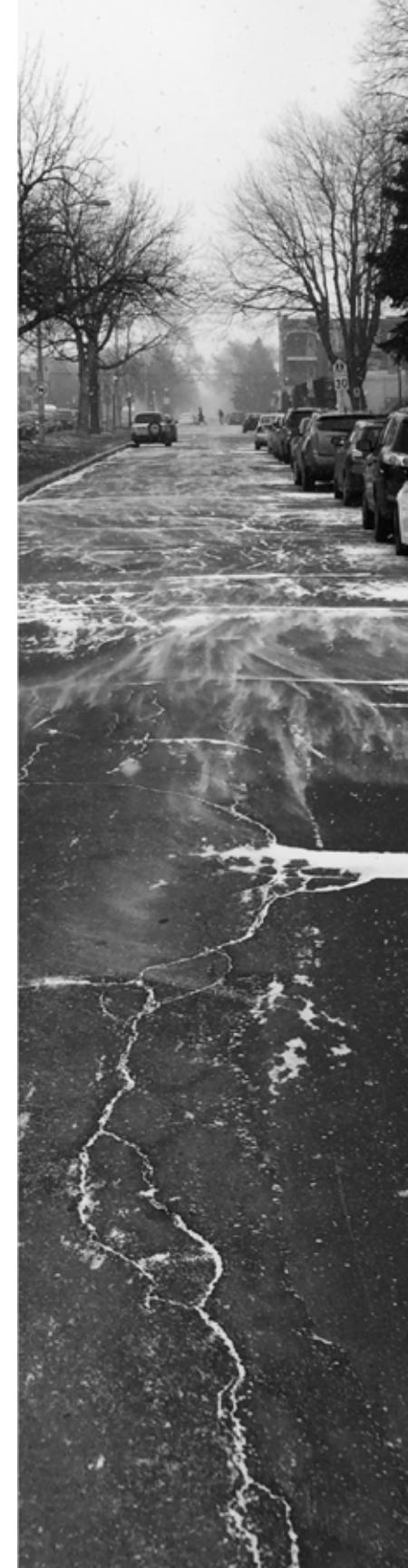
**Change**

the broken toothpick in my pocket  
almonds  
fields with dirt piles  
and cigarettes  
make me want to change my life.

**The Rain Annoys Me**

when it rains in random droplets,  
on my arm, ear, cheek,  
and the way footprints leave a white sheen  
where bubbles erupt and squiggle  
like translucent tree frogs  
it annoys me,  
the way rain makes sidewalks look like tofu  
and trees like they're wrapped in roast beef  
as if I could eat them without hurting my gums.  
I'd like a coat cause it's raining  
so hard the frogs are gone,  
and I'm hungry  
but not for trees,  
or sidewalks,  
or the metro floor  
like that kid  
from channel four.

*Photo by Andrew Jefferson*



## **Carving**

While I love the carving sound  
of ballpoint on crisp pulp  
the city drones  
far from children yelling in the streets  
a car beeps  
far from the ring of an old bicycle bell  
and the train whistles  
at the stuffing under my skull

## **Class trip**

My brother Luke  
was at the library with his elementary class  
when he realized he had forgotten the library card  
his teacher had reminded him all week to bring.

Luke called dad at the construction site,  
and when he arrived,  
Luke's friend said,  
“hey, I think this bum  
wants to shake your hand.” ▶

*Andrew Jefferson  
was Born in Toronto,  
and grew up in Port  
Hardy and Victoria,  
BC. He moved to  
Montreal in 2004 and  
attended the creative  
writing program at  
Concordia University.  
After three years in  
Montreal he moved  
to Verdun, which he  
says reminds him of  
his old neighborhood.  
Fourteen years later  
he's married with kids  
and has a career as  
an Integration Aide at  
Verdun Elementary. He  
thinks “she lost the plot  
but still loves the story.”*

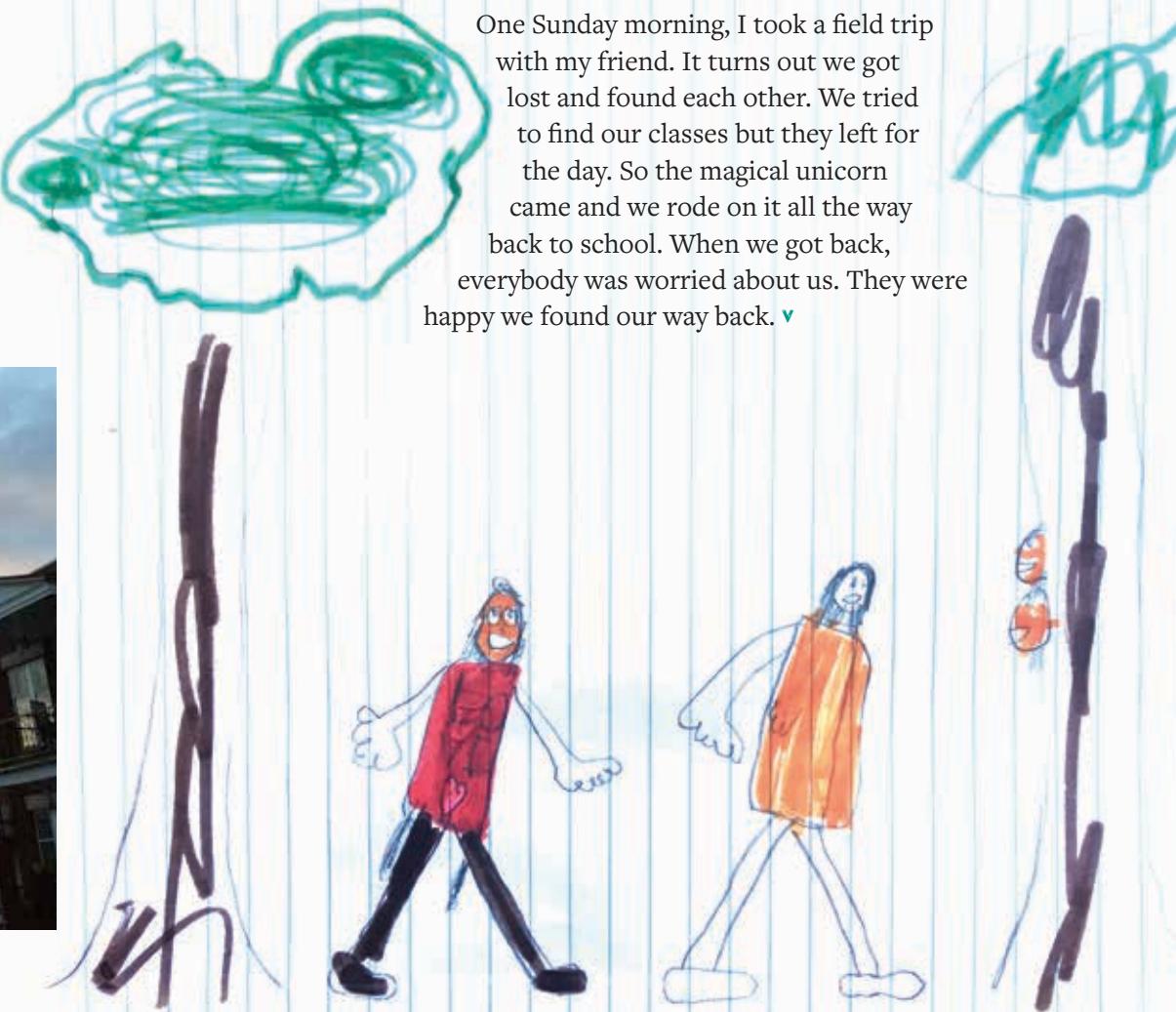
*Photo by Andrew Jefferson*

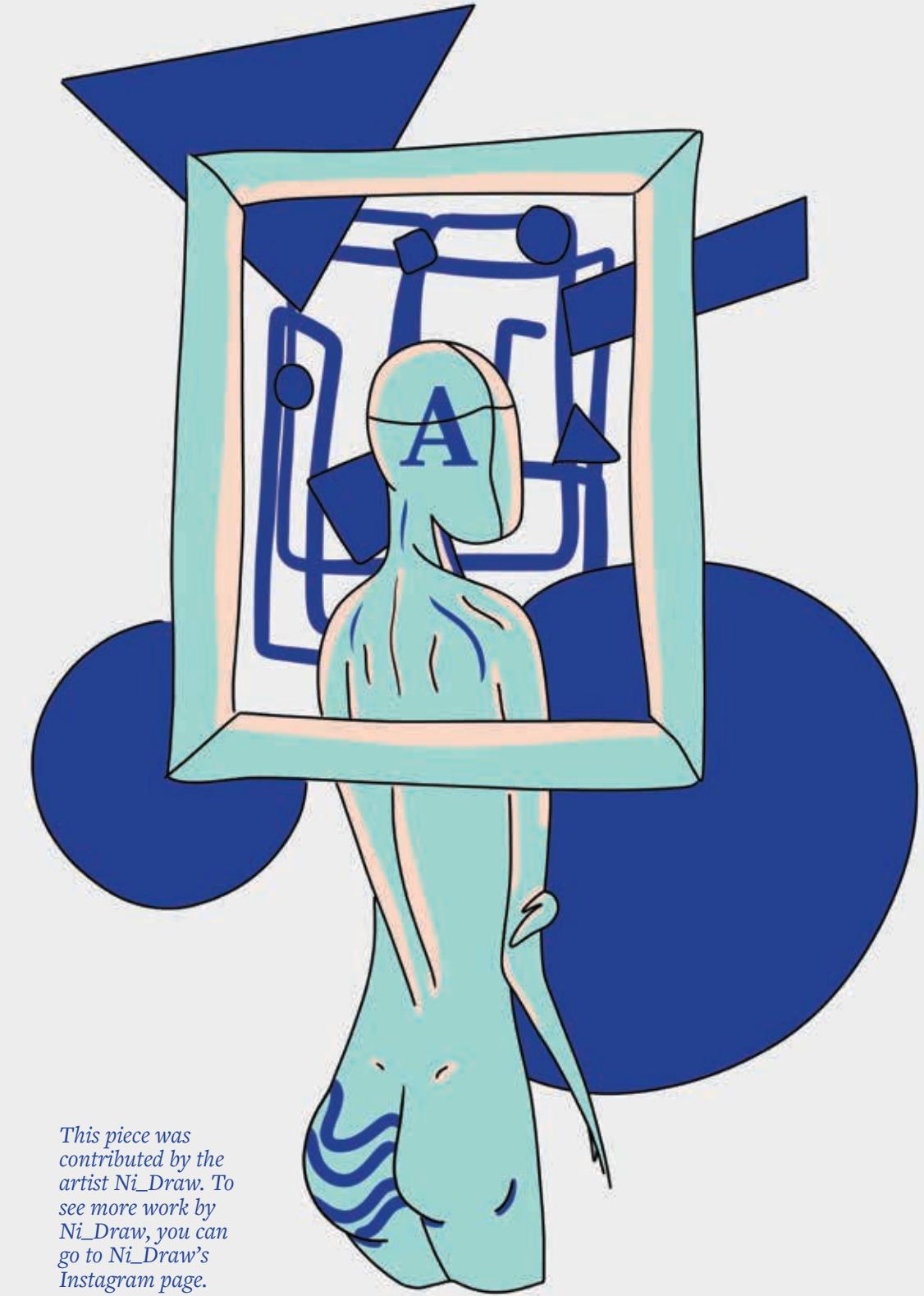


During our visits to various community events this past year, we met Kayla and Jade. It was a hot summer day made for pools, but they gave us some of their time and came up with this little beauty of a story. It was still hot and the local pools were still close, but we pushed a bit more and asked them to draw something. They did that too! Thanks girls!

## **A Story by JADE & KAYLA**

One Sunday morning, I took a field trip with my friend. It turns out we got lost and found each other. We tried to find our classes but they left for the day. So the magical unicorn came and we rode on it all the way back to school. When we got back, everybody was worried about us. They were happy we found our way back. ▶





This piece was contributed by the artist Ni\_Draw. To see more work by Ni\_Draw, you can go to Ni\_Draw's Instagram page.

## VERDUN

by Lois Lockhart

I met Fabienne the second week of my new life in Verdun, Quebec. She was tending her community garden plot nestled between the banks of the St. Lawrence and LaSalle Boulevard, an amazing parkway offering a variety of activities to folks of all ages from near and far, residents and visitors—cycle paths, wide green spaces dappled with mature cottonwoods for strollers and dog walkers, a pond with water jets for squealing excited children to explore, benches for the old and the in love. A great restaurant overlooking the river is steps from a theatre offering free events according to season. Venture along the river a little further and the path narrows to a dog walker’s dream—no bikes or cars, just the natural beauty of a woodsy, riverside paradise. No sound of the built environment, just the natural... birdsong, lapping waters of the historic St. Lawrence, the rustle of leaves as cooling, welcome breezes fan the surrounding woods.

Fabienne had finished her garden work for the day and was walking her bike out of the plot when we met. I asked how I might take part. On finding me new to the community, she walked her bike home so we could continue our conversation. By the time I got home, there was an email from her giving contact names and an itinerary of events going on locally that she figured I would enjoy. In the month following, I have discovered Fabienne to be typical of this vibrant, evolving community, steeped in history and welcoming to strangers from across Canada and from other countries near and far—a distinct ingredient yet part of greater Montreal, and a jewel in our diverse Canadian culture.

It’s easy for people like me to allow ourselves to be herded. I’m a solo, senior female—with low vision. Well meaning friends and family often want to guide folks like me into like-minded groupings where commonality trumps diversity. But I had a hill yet to climb and an idea yet to be born. My roots are in Ontario—from birth to senorhood, raising a family along the way and becoming a widow. A stint in British Columbia allowed me to continue as a WASP, uni-lingual and part of the default group who enjoy

unearned privilege without ever questioning that lofty “right.” My son and his wife live here and offer me an assist any time I need one—I have only to ask. I yard-saled my household keeping only limited belongings and, with my we chihuahua pal, Chico, boarded a plane for Montreal and settled into a studio apartment in the heart of Verdun, overlooking a great city-cape. And every day is an adventure and very often a surprise.

A vehicle is not an absolute requirement here, public transit offers a way to get anywhere and often only a pair of feet are necessary. Wellington Avenue rolls out the welcome mat to residents who respond with a kind of camaraderie that I thought had died out long ago. Language has failed to be a barrier and is, instead, often a prelude to a friendly encounter. Most shop keepers are bi lingual as is the general population. And I’ve enrolled in French classes with an eye (or an ear) to becoming a more integrated part of the local scene.

Our communities are those safe places we choose to raise our children, expand our interests, and grow our awareness. I’ve been carrying around the germ of a novel I wish to scribble—a place where, some 50 years hence, we have dealt together with climate change, sustainable living, an alternative to the present capitalist economic structure and have replaced the destruction of war with a peaceful alternative. Canada, as a middle power, a welcoming, caring, peace-loving nation could lead the way. Co-operative living becomes the norm and the mainstay, a beacon to all who wish to participate. It will not be utopian but, instead, as Margaret Atwood opines, speculative science—a place that springs from what is and projects to a place that could be. Canada can be that place; Verdun is a good starting point. I look forward, after a bit more adapting to my new surroundings, to begin to pen that novel. And I’m ever so grateful to be in my new community where awareness can be birthed and nurtured.

And now it’s time to take wee Chico out to play in the parkway on the St. Lawrence for a bit. After all, we never know who we’ll chance to encounter this day. And while out we’ll pick up whatever we want for supper from friendly cocal shops on Wellington and environs. That’s how I now live my life...one bag at a time. Savouring whatever looks great, is in season, and locally grown. And Fabienne tells me I can go a further step into gardening by joining a co-operative garden experience. After all, Verdun is a place to grow.

La vie est belle. ▼



Photo by Elisabeth Badertscher

# EVELYN WAKELING

## PEOPLE OF VERDUN 2

During one of our community visits this past summer, we had the chance to interview Evelyn Wakeling. Evelyn has lived much of her life in Verdun, but when initially asked to sit with us for a bit, she humbly replied, “I’ve don’t think I would have much to share.” She then went on to describe in vivid detail, and with much heart, her connections and knowledge of Verdun. We are incredibly grateful that she gave us her time.

### *Can you start by telling us your name?*

My name is Evelyn Wakeling, but I was born Evelyn Emeston 80 years ago.

### *When did you first start to live in Verdun?*

When I was eight I came to Crawford Park because my dad had built a home there or he was in the stages of building a home there on Leclerc. We moved in when it was partially finished. We had the fireplace heated downstairs, we had a pot belly stove in the dining room. The upstairs was all curtained off to keep the heat down. We roughed it while my father finished building the house on Leclerc. I lived there until I was 21. I went to Verdun High School with two brothers.

### *So did you do all of your public schooling in Verdun?*

I went to Riverview school, I went to Woodland school, and then on to Verdun High School. So, there are a lot of memories. My mom went to Verdun High School, my children went to Verdun High School and at their anniversary, when they had the big anniversary, our family had three large tables. One for my mother’s group and her friends, one for my husband and I and our friends, and one for my children and their friends, so we are a great part of that history too. I meet the odd teacher from Verdun High. They’re all retired and some of the times I’ve met them at some funerals unfortunately, but it’s good to reminisce.

### *Can you share a little about your impressions of Crawford Park?*

I enjoyed the friendship and the open door policy of Crawford Park, which is part of Verdun. And if anyone doesn’t know where Crawford Park is, it’s the western side of the Douglas hospital. I grew up alongside the Douglas Hospital and I’m very familiar with it. When I got married and had three children, I moved back to Crawford Park, after being in Brossard and Lasalle. I came to appreciate again that open door policy and the friendship in the neighbourhood that we grew up in.

### *What’s one thing that stood out to you about Verdun then and now?*

Everybody looked after each other’s children. They kept an eye on each other and that was Verdun in those days. I remember that well. You get on the bus and you were always greeting people you knew. After 40 years, my husband died and I was living there still on Crawford Bridge at the corner of David and then my son who had property in Verdun offered to help me downsize because it was getting too much without my husband around. So I moved into his fourplex, the downstairs part of it. I had a wonderfully good experience with the neighbours around and, although I don’t have children to introduce me to my neighbors, I have a kitten. So the kitten introduced me to my neighbours as I walked here and there.

### *We understand you’re very involved in one of the churches in Verdun.*

The church in Crawford Park closed because we’re running out of numbers and so we moved here to the Epiphany Church. This church has a family history for me.

### *How?*

Now the Peniston family had a farm on the corner of Lacharité and Lasalle, overlooking the water. Out of that family tree, the May family emerged. Edward May was mayor of Verdun in the early 1900s, he put the cornerstone here at the church of the Epiphany. So this church has some history for me and for my family, he’s my great grandfather.

### *You were also witness to the building of some very significant landmarks in Verdun.*

I was around as a baby during the war years, second world war and they were building the Natatorium in those days as a work project to help people out who were on the dole. I can remember vaguely being told stories about

that. As a child and as a teenager, I went to the Natatorium often, because I was living in Crawford Park and I could easily walk over.

***What was a day at the Natatorium like for you?***

We were young and I was a redhead in those days from my Scotch heritage. I could only spent so long in the sunshine, but I remember the roof. We used to go on the roof after and you could get food and little things like that upstairs. It was a congregating space. But the actual swimming I enjoyed. I wasn't much of a diver but I enjoyed the swimming and getting together with my friends. We used to all say "We'll meet at the Nat" and it was a place for the boys and girls in that area.

***We understand the boardwalk is a very special place for you.***

I walked that Boardwalk, my husband courted me in that boardwalk, and, after, when we both had cancer, we walked hand and hand along that boardwalk and reminisced about all the good times. So, I am a survivor of cancer and am very grateful for it, and thank the good lord for me being here to share that with you.

***Thanks you so much, Evelyn. ▶***

*Photo by Elisabeth Badertscher*

Sasha originally wrote this story for an anthology of the Suspicious Fish Community Literacy and Arts Program. Suspicious Fish has published close to a thousand wicked awesome stories over its ten years, but we chose this one to represent the organization because of its bright and funny perceptions of Verdun through the eyes of a young person. Thanks Sasha!

## **TALES OF THE VERDUMPSTERS**

**By Sasha Mallette**

It all started with a group of eight kids. Their names were Lyric, Sky, Alexy, Sasha, Kiki, Madi, and the last and the least...Kris.

These eight kids hated their hometown. It all starts here. Alexy, Sasha, and lyric had been planning to do something big so Alexy brought her sister, Kiki, and Kiki brought her friend Shayla, Lyric brought her sister, Sky and I brought my 'besties' Madison and Kris. We all the idea to create a big squad. They called it the 'Verdumpsters'. These girls and the one boy (Kris) didn't care what people said about them. They were independent, daring, stubborn, blunt, responsible, mature, and respected. Kris was the only guy there. Each person had a label. The diva was Shayla who was also a drama queen. The sporty kids were Kiki, Alexy, Lyric, and Sasha. The nerd was Madison and the artistic one was Kris.

Since Sasha was one of Kris' closest friends they had the idea to stop drug use because Sasha's cousin had died from drugs. Eventually the Verdumpsters raised money to stop drug use.

If you want to share your problems or get something off your chest, Please submit your stories to Tales of The Verdumpsters. To submit your story, roll it up in a paper ball and throw it onto the street. ▶

The following poetry was given to us by a community member who wishes to remain anonymous in name. We think it is important to make the distinction between the anonymity of the author's name, but not the purpose of the work. The content is difficult. It is also brave and generous in its intent to share and reach out to community regarding difficult subject matter. In sharing this, the artist is not only following a path to their own healing, but also letting others who may have had similar adversity know that they are not alone. We think it's important to say these two words again: brave and generous.

Poems by  
**ANONYMOUS**

**Radio**

She is lying  
on dark silk sheets,  
smooth, her brown hair spilling on the pillow like water through a stream.  
She faces the beige wall of her room,  
angled away from me.

The sheets smelling of sex,  
the wind blowing through the blue curtains goes unnoticed.

All I hear is the faint sound of the radio in the other room.  
I do not move, I wait for her to speak  
*This doesn't mean I love you*  
She does not turn to look at me

I tell her that I know  
Voice a little shaken, trying not to crack,  
She does not notice my body tremble.

My only consolation is  
the faint humming of the radio.

**Bedtime**

The pounding on the floorboards outside my room does not phase me as I  
    lay quietly  
Under the thin protection of my blankets.  
The clock blares 1:03 AM.

The sound of glass shattering,  
A piercing shriek,  
Resonates through the house.  
The squeaking of bedsprings from the other room makes me aware  
She woke my sister up.

Her words, become inaudible from my dark room,  
And still they hold me in their suffocating grip.  
The screaming,  
The loud thuds continue.  
until there's a haunting silence that fills the house.  
The only sound,  
the dimming of the refrigerator.

I close my eyes and my heartbeat echoes in my ears. I wish for sleep.  
– It does not come. ▶



*Photo by Andrew Jefferson*

# GOING TO THE DENTIST

By Carlos Lopez

Six months ago I went to the dentist. Before going I called his secretary and asked her for an appointment. She gave me an appointment for January, 24th.

When the secretary asked me about my motive for seeing the doctor, I did answer her that I had some teeth which were bothering me a lot, also that I was suffering from an intense toothache which was driving me crazy.

On January 24h, I went to the dentist office and made the check out with the secretary. I told her that I had too much pain and I needed to see the dentist as soon as possible.

The secretary called the dentist and told him about my emergency. The dentist told her that he would see me next, because he was very busy treating another patient.

I said OK and went to have a seat. I remained quiet, trying to calm myself a little bit, but I felt dizzy and then I fainted.

I awaked seated on the dentist's chair. He questioned me about how I felt? Then, I said to him that I was fine. After that, he started to work and gave me an oral examination and a complete set of dental x-rays.

Finally, he told me, "Carlos, you are in a big trouble. You need a dental implant, five cavity fillings, three extractions, and two crowns, so that you will be as new as you were in your twenties."

I was willing to accept the dentist's suggestion but before, I asked him for a budget. He thought for an instant and after a while came out with his answer: "Carlos, more or less, it will cost you around five and a half thousand dollars Canadian."

After hearing the price, I came to realize that all the pain that I felt before was already gone. v

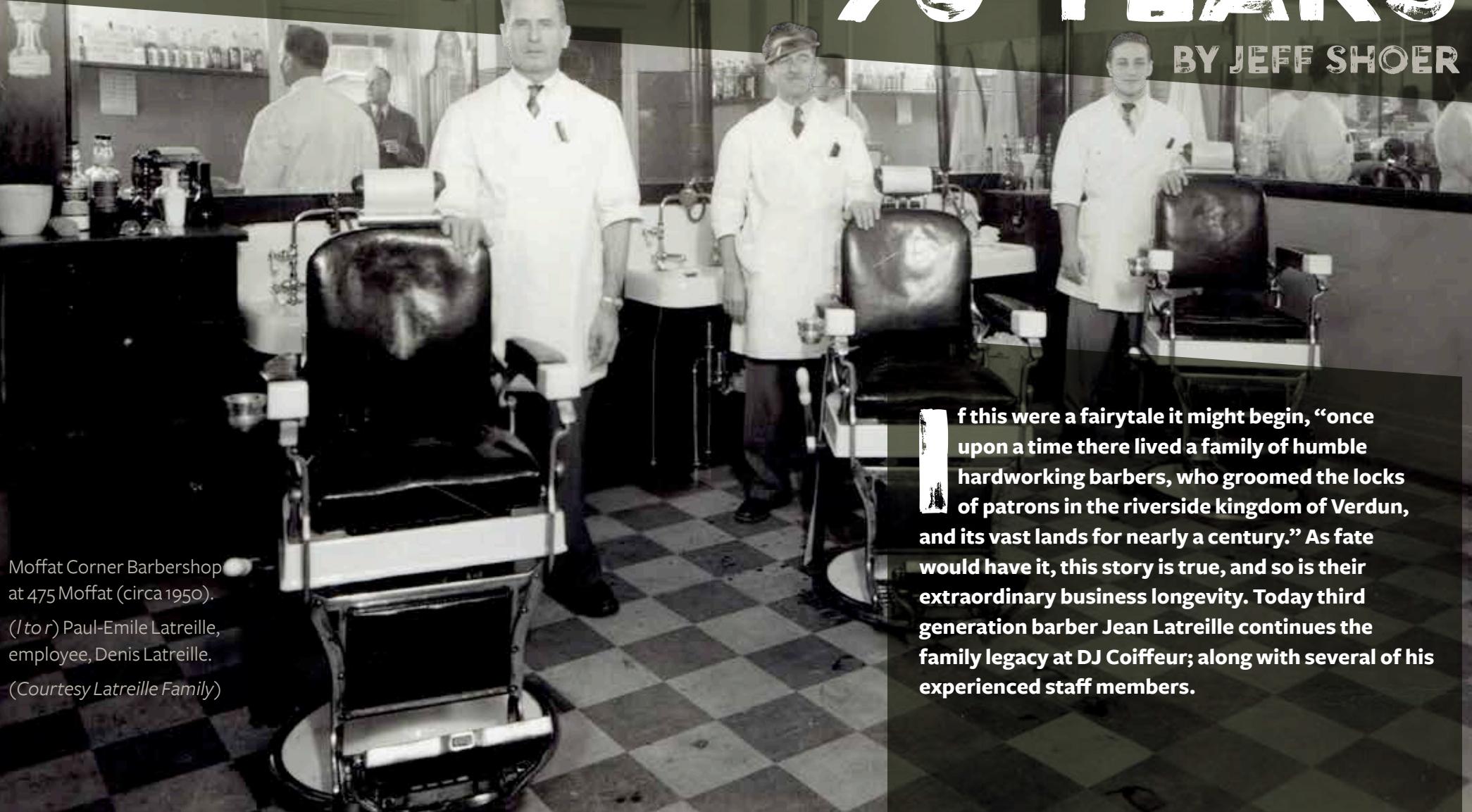


Artwork by Thaiz de Lopez

THE LATREILLES

# BARBERING IN VERDUN FOR 90 YEARS

BY JEFF SHOER



Moffat Corner Barbershop  
at 475 Moffat (circa 1950).

(l to r) Paul-Emile Latreille,  
employee, Denis Latreille.

(Courtesy Latreille Family)

If this were a fairytale it might begin, “once upon a time there lived a family of humble hardworking barbers, who groomed the locks of patrons in the riverside kingdom of Verdun, and its vast lands for nearly a century.” As fate would have it, this story is true, and so is their extraordinary business longevity. Today third generation barber Jean Latreille continues the family legacy at DJ Coiffeur; along with several of his experienced staff members.

The Latreilles have been shaving beards or cutting and styling hair, for the past nine decades on or close to *rue de Verdun* (aka Verdun Avenue) between the blocks of Beatty and Brault. Generations of Verdunites and surrounding residents may have had their hair coifed at one of four previous locations, or the fifth and current DJ Coiffeur (5955 Verdun): a unisex hairdresser and barbershop located in the same building as Gym Expert; occupying the right rear corner—straight through the main doors.

To be more specific Jean Latreille's grandfather; Paul-Émile Latreille began barbering near the corner of Moffat and Verdun in 1929. Apparently, to the best of son Denis Latreille's memory he began cutting the hair of loggers and lumberjacks in the 'bush' prior (possibly as far away as the state of Maine). At one point a foreman noticed his skills and work ethic, suggesting he go back to Montreal and learn a trade. He then enrolled in barbering courses circa 1922, and started barbering at various shops around town (it was common to move between shops every few months).

Jean describing his grandfather as, "un homme de peu de mots," but smart. Being a man of few words it's apropos, you won't find a marquee over the entrance flashing, "Chez Latreille: Barbers Since 1929." Due to the Latrielle's humble and low-key nature you might simply walk past the unassuming façade; never to know the amazing histories of Paul-Émile, Denis and Jean Latreille. What you may notice upon walking in (as I did a few years earlier); it's both unpretentious and welcoming.

When I sat in Jean's Belmont chair (circa 1950s), I must have felt there was more to DJ Coiffeur than met the eye. Innocently asking Jean in 2015 mid-haircut, "how long have you been cutting hair?" Between snips he replied, "Fourty-two years." I responded, "wow, that's almost my entire life!"

Continuing on; he explained his father Denis had cut hair for 65 years, and even worked Saturdays until mid 2015. Further up the family tree; Jean's grandfather, Paul-Émile barbered for 40 plus

years. Lengthy individual stints, however, when added sequentially equals 150 years of hair cutting.

After that haircut, I decided I needed to inquire more about this incredible family of barbers, and to somehow share their story. Over the next few years, I had several chats with Jean, and arranged two enjoyable and information packed interviews with Denis. For the later I was lucky enough to sit in an empty barber's chair while I chatted with the two Latreille's for over an hour: wholeheartedly confirming details and memories.

Denis quipped at times, "I'm not sure, I was not even born." Regardless of how much there was to remember, the small tightly knit 'team' helped fill in the gaps to the best of their knowledge. Denis indicated he got to know (and hear about) his customer's lives, families and kids: when someone got new car and even its model. With that, he surmised he'd used his mouth as much as his hair cutting skills. Jean continues on that tradition Tuesday to Saturday, while standing behind his barber's chair.

To illustrate what I would imagine is typical morning barbershop small talk (while waiting to meet Denis for a follow-up interview), I overheard the gentleman in Jean's chair catching up with another sitting

next to me. The topic quickly became how fast time flies. The sentiment cleverly confirmed with good humour: "you wake up Monday morning, and it's actually Friday."

By complete chance that witty gentleman turned out to be Gerry O'Reilly, former Verdun city councillor (1981-1985), and son of former Verdun mayor George O'Reilly, who was also a former patron. Gerry told me he had moved from Griffintown in 1942 (now over 80 himself), and has been getting his haircut by the Latreille's for 50-55 years. I later discovered by speaking to them both individually that Denis and Gerry played hockey against each other at the Verdun Auditorium (another of the many small world Verdun moments discovered researching, or throughout the article).

One particular client Denis and Jean both remembered: a gentleman from Dorval. They referred to him as 'The man



from Dorval“ (not knowing his actual name). He’d come for over 75 years despite only having a ring of hair. He’d express, ”I don’t come here for the haircut, I come here for you.”

Denis recalled hearing a story from his father about a well dressed man who would get up from the chair; look in the mirror and say, “that’s exactly what I didn’t want to have!” They’re both still curious if he was serious.

I confirmed the obvious suspicion the DJ in their current name stood for Denis and Jean, and was interested to learn of the various business names that changed along with several moves around the area (see chronology below), while building their clientele: mainly by word of mouth.

They have rarely placed ads or been written up in print like you might imagine. An exception to this minimal publicity was a special two-page spread; placed in the Verdun Messenger (Le Messager Verdun) in 1969; to commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Moffat Barber Shop and expressed thanks, many thanks and “merci, trois fois merci,” to their customers.

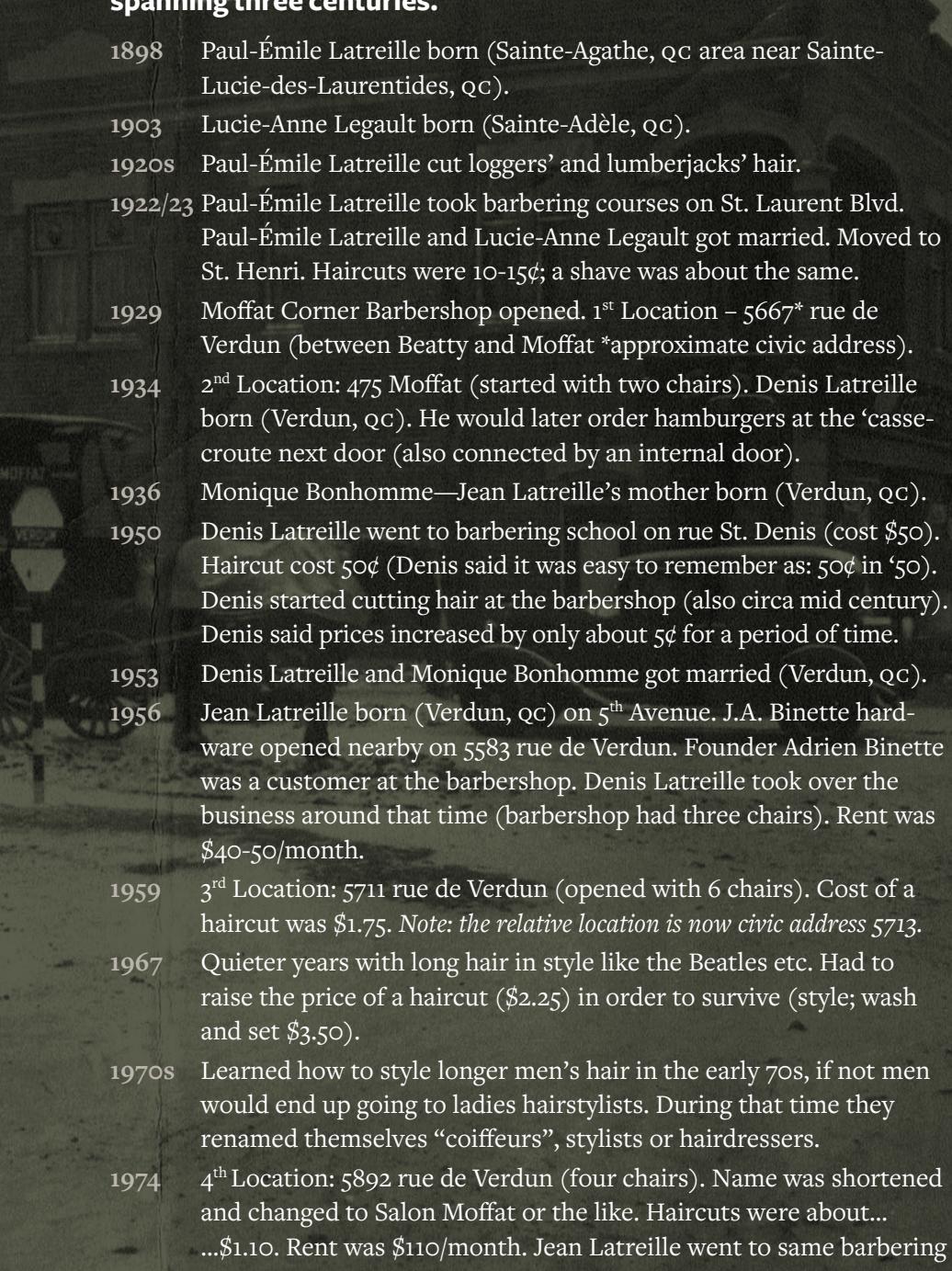
Another article appeared in the same paper years later circa 2010; which acknowledged 60 years of barbing for Denis, discussed barbing trends and mentioned some of their notable customers including past Verdun mayors; Edward Wilson (1939-1960) and George O'Reilly (1960-1966), plus professional hockey players/coaches; Scotty Bowman, Dollard St. Laurent, Ralph Backstrom, Marc Tardif, Réjean Houle. Many of whom were born or lived in the area. Other former customers like former Verdun mayor Lucien Caron (1977-1985), Bryce Mackasey former Member of Parliament for Verdun (1962-1976); his son Blair Mackasey and Don Marshall both pro hockey players were mentioned during various conversations. The reverse question, “who's hair haven't they cut?” may have yielded a shorter, yet less interesting answer.

When I asked Jean about what the best way to describe his current shop, Jean said, “we're half hairdresser and half barbershop,” mentioning that barbershops were out of style in the 80s, but now that the Tonsorial latin: Tondere (to shave) chic factor is back, he put the well known red, blue and white stripes that are synonymous with barbershops, back in the window.

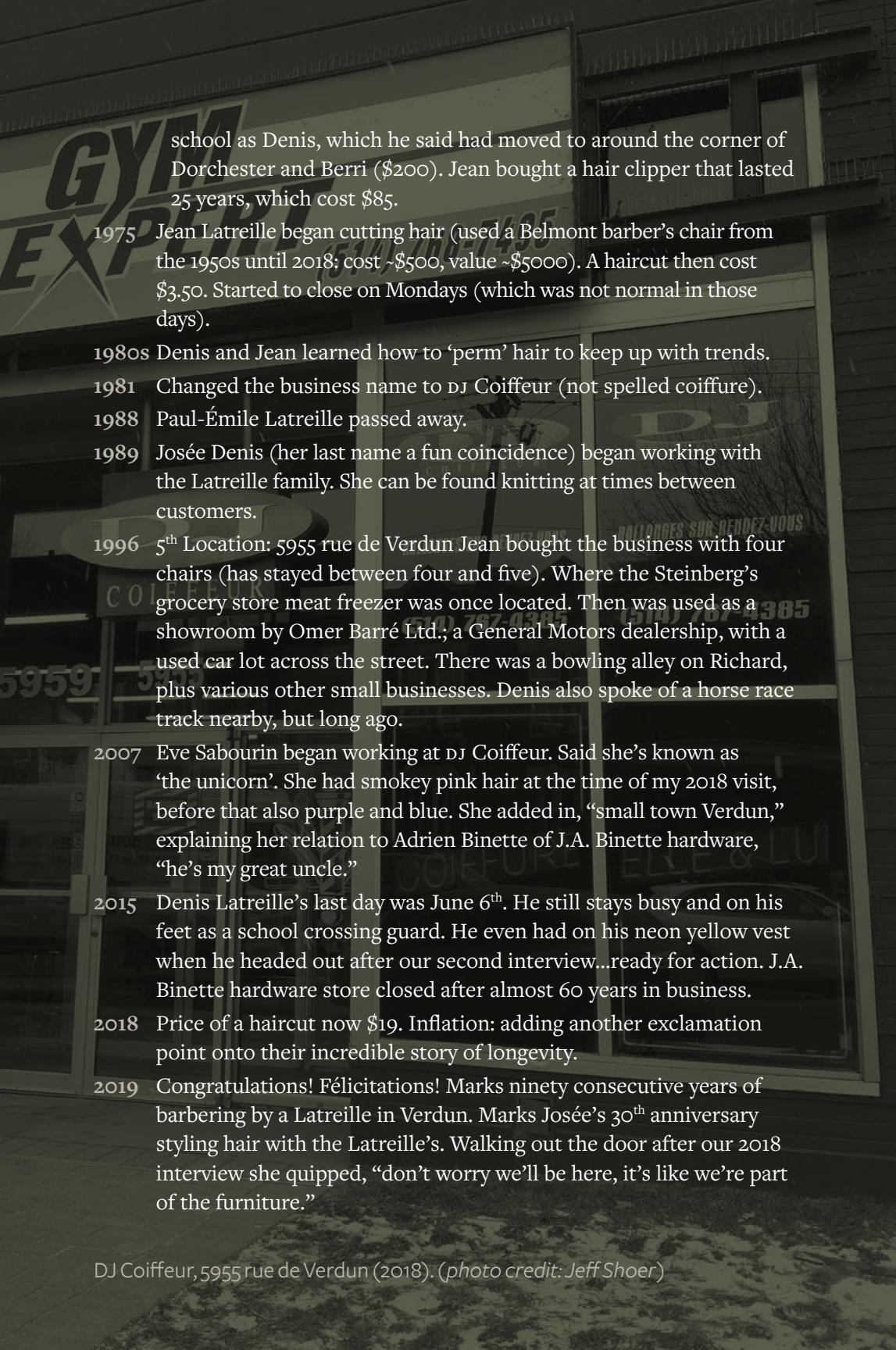
It would take another whole article to review the styles of the last decades and get the Latreille's opinions on: beehives, bowl cuts and buzz cuts, to Caesars, comb overs, fauxhawks, and flat tops (yes, they're alphabetical).

Due to styles made famous by the Beatles, and other popular bands around the time of Expo 67, Denis was forced to reduce the number of chairs to three. “Those were tough years,” recalled Denis. Thankfully, they

### **Below is a chronology of the Latreille's profound history spanning three centuries.**

- 
- 1898 Paul-Émile Latreille born (Sainte-Agathe, QC area near Sainte-Lucie-des-Laurentides, QC).
- 1903 Lucie-Anne Legault born (Sainte-Adèle, QC).
- 1920s Paul-Émile Latreille cut loggers' and lumberjacks' hair.
- 1922/23 Paul-Émile Latreille took barbing courses on St. Laurent Blvd. Paul-Émile Latreille and Lucie-Anne Legault got married. Moved to St. Henri. Haircuts were 10-15¢; a shave was about the same.
- 1929 Moffat Corner Barbershop opened. 1<sup>st</sup> Location – 5667\* rue de Verdun (between Beatty and Moffat \*approximate civic address).
- 1934 2<sup>nd</sup> Location: 475 Moffat (started with two chairs). Denis Latreille born (Verdun, QC). He would later order hamburgers at the ‘casse-croute next door (also connected by an internal door).
- 1936 Monique Bonhomme—Jean Latreille's mother born (Verdun, QC).
- 1950 Denis Latreille went to barbing school on rue St. Denis (cost \$50). Haircut cost 50¢ (Denis said it was easy to remember as: 50¢ in '50). Denis started cutting hair at the barbershop (also circa mid century). Denis said prices increased by only about 5¢ for a period of time.
- 1953 Denis Latreille and Monique Bonhomme got married (Verdun, QC).
- 1956 Jean Latreille born (Verdun, QC) on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. J.A. Binette hardware opened nearby on 5583 rue de Verdun. Founder Adrien Binette was a customer at the barbershop. Denis Latreille took over the business around that time (barbershop had three chairs). Rent was \$40-50/month.
- 1959 3<sup>rd</sup> Location: 5711 rue de Verdun (opened with 6 chairs). Cost of a haircut was \$1.75. Note: the relative location is now civic address 5713.
- 1967 Quieter years with long hair in style like the Beatles etc. Had to raise the price of a haircut (\$2.25) in order to survive (style; wash and set \$3.50).
- 1970s Learned how to style longer men's hair in the early 70s, if not men would end up going to ladies hairstylists. During that time they renamed themselves “coiffeurs”, stylists or hairdressers.
- 1974 4<sup>th</sup> Location: 5892 rue de Verdun (four chairs). Name was shortened and changed to Salon Moffat or the like. Haircuts were about... ...\$1.10. Rent was \$110/month. Jean Latreille went to same barbing

Moffat and rue de Verdun (circa 1931). (courtesy Jean-Gilles Cossette)



- school as Denis, which he said had moved to around the corner of Dorchester and Berri (\$200). Jean bought a hair clipper that lasted 25 years, which cost \$85.
- 1975 Jean Latreille began cutting hair (used a Belmont barber's chair from the 1950s until 2018; cost ~\$500, value ~\$5000). A haircut then cost \$3.50. Started to close on Mondays (which was not normal in those days).
- 1980s Denis and Jean learned how to 'perm' hair to keep up with trends.
- 1981 Changed the business name to DJ Coiffeur (not spelled coiffure).
- 1988 Paul-Émile Latreille passed away.
- 1989 Josée Denis (her last name a fun coincidence) began working with the Latreille family. She can be found knitting at times between customers.
- 1996 5<sup>th</sup> Location: 5955 rue de Verdun Jean bought the business with four chairs (has stayed between four and five). Where the Steinberg's grocery store meat freezer was once located. Then was used as a showroom by Omer Barré Ltd.; a General Motors dealership, with a used car lot across the street. There was a bowling alley on Richard, plus various other small businesses. Denis also spoke of a horse race track nearby, but long ago.
- 2007 Eve Sabourin began working at DJ Coiffeur. Said she's known as 'the unicorn'. She had smokey pink hair at the time of my 2018 visit, before that also purple and blue. She added in, "small town Verdun," explaining her relation to Adrien Binette of J.A. Binette hardware, "he's my great uncle."
- 2015 Denis Latreille's last day was June 6<sup>th</sup>. He still stays busy and on his feet as a school crossing guard. He even had on his neon yellow vest when he headed out after our second interview...ready for action. J.A. Binette hardware store closed after almost 60 years in business.
- 2018 Price of a haircut now \$19. Inflation: adding another exclamation point onto their incredible story of longevity.
- 2019 Congratulations! Félicitations! Marks ninety consecutive years of bartering by a Latreille in Verdun. Marks Josée's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary styling hair with the Latreille's. Walking out the door after our 2018 interview she quipped, "don't worry we'll be here, it's like we're part of the furniture."

DJ Coiffeur, 5955 rue de Verdun (2018). (photo credit: Jeff Shoer)

survived and retooled their skills: learning how to perm and dye hair for the trends of the 70s and 80s, which also included 'perms' for men and Afros.

Understandably, the styles and prices may have changed throughout the years, but you can still be assured to get them 'all cut' by a pair of experienced hands. Speaking of those hands, one of the last questions I asked Jean, "what he felt had attributed to their long term success?" At first he spoke of family and passion then added, "in our kind of business if you don't like your job, you can't do it." He further expressed to continue for three generations is not easy, though you wouldn't know it from the upbeat and jovial spirit during our visits.

What I concluded when sitting in that barber's chair; Denis and Jean are both down to earth about their incredible history, but you can sense a well-deserved pride under the surface. One final not so 'old-fashioned' happily-ever-after notion; a great haircut, familiar faces, enjoyable conversation and some good laughs never go out of style. ▶

*Author's Notes: The story details are to the best of their knowledge via interviews in 2015 and 2018, but may have minor discrepancies due to the passage of time, memory and records. In the interest of sharing the story, everyone did their best to recreate; timelines, figures, places and names.*

*Many, many thanks to Jean Latreille, Denis Latreille, Josée Denis and Eve Sabourin for their time and patience, while I asked and then 're-asked' questions; many questions, while putting this story together. Mille mercies.*



Jean and Denis Latreille (2015). (photo credit: Jeff Shoer)

# THE PASSENGER

## by Sarah Vresk

My father picked us up with a passenger in his car. My brother and I were staying with him for the weekend. I was 11 and my brother was 7. Sometimes my father had a friend with him when he picked us up, one of his drinking buddies who we'd known for years, but I'd never seen this man before. My father introduced him as Vaughn. Vaughn had curly brown hair and wore a lot of denim that had creases where the dirt showed. The car smelled like dried sweat and oil and old smoke.

Talking to us in the rear view mirror as he drove, my father explained in his loud informative voice that Vaughn was a friend he met in jail. He had been out only a week, and we were just giving him a ride somewhere. Then he turned back to Vaughn, picking up their conversation from before we got in the car. I watched them as they talked. My brother was quiet, looking out his window. My father used his hands too much when he talked, and when he laughed, he always sounded like he was drunk.

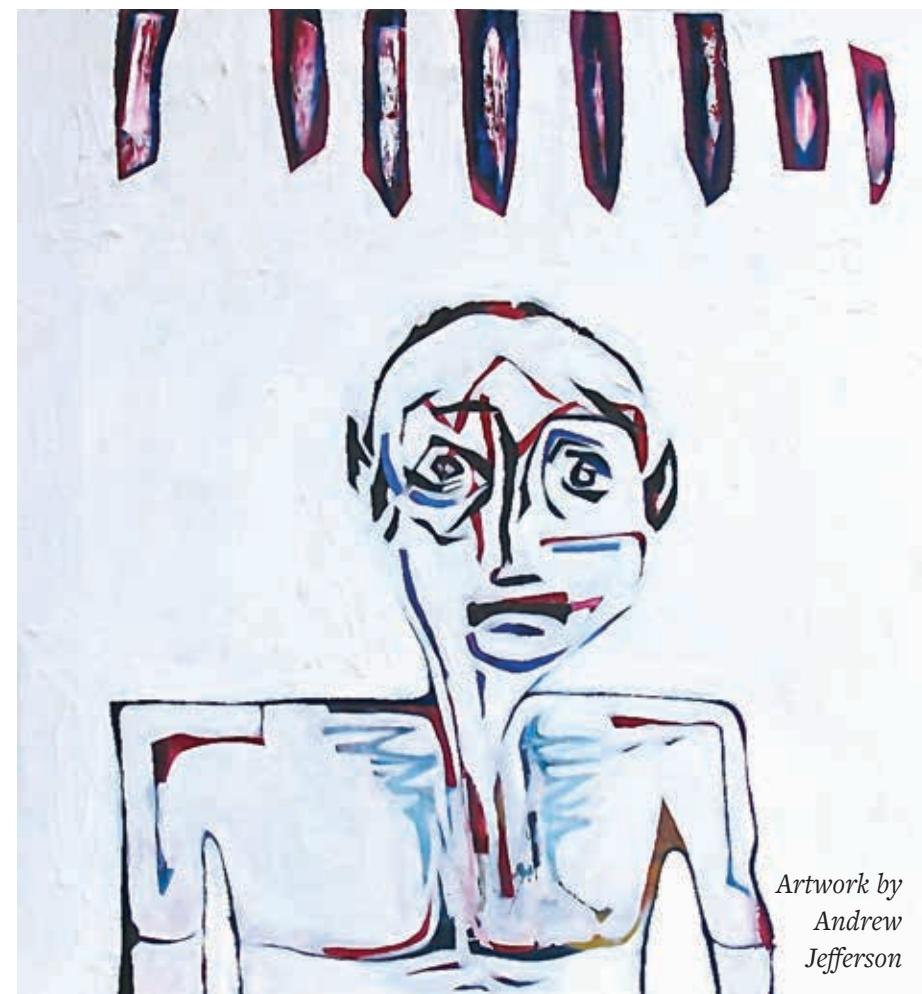
We stopped at a gas station with a little store attached. After he got out of the car, Vaughn poked his head back in to ask my brother and me what candy we wanted and I couldn't think of anything I wanted him to bring me. I couldn't even think of what candy I liked. My brother said blue freezie and so I said that too.

After Vaughn shut the door, my father turned around and explained that Vaughn had been staying with him since he got out, we were just giving him a ride. He wanted to help his friend because it was hard after you got out of jail. No one wanted to help you because they thought you were a criminal. That's why people who get out of jail always end up back in jail, because everything gets fucked up after you go in, and no one trusts you anymore except the people you were inside with.

I asked what Vaughn did to get in jail in the first place. My father told me that, like in his own situation, the police had gotten involved in family matters that were none of their business, and Vaughn's ex-wife had accused him of things he hadn't done, but cops always believe the woman and the man is always the bad guy and the cops never know the whole situation, they only know what the ex-wife told them. He was getting worked up, yelling more than talking, and so I stopped asking questions.

Vaughn got back in the car and handed us each a blue freezie with the top already cut open. I thought about Vaughn carrying the open freezies and how maybe by accident his fingers had touched the exposed tip of one of them and it would taste like the salt of his fingers when I put it in my mouth. I couldn't eat it at first, and waited until my brother started on his. If my mother had been there, she would've had scissors in her purse.

We dropped Vaughn off somewhere in east Hamilton, in front of a low, faded white house. As my dad pulled in the drive, Vaughn talked about all of us going sometime to a cottage of a friend of his up in Brace Bridge. He said good bye to my brother and me and got out of the car. We drove back up town to buy groceries for the weekend. ▼



Artwork by  
Andrew  
Jefferson

# GORDON

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The Church of The Epiphany is located on Wellington street at the corner of Gordon. The church is run by a wonderful group of community members who are responsible for a growing number of programs and partnerships in our community. Among this great group is man who is vital when it comes to making sure the church engine runs smoothly. He doesn't care much for attention, but we managed to sit with him for a few minutes to see what he was willing to share about himself, and his thoughts on the church and Verdun in general.

**Can I have your name please?**

My name is Gordon.

**And where are you from?**

Well I was born in Pointe-St-Charles, raised there up until 18, then I moved to Verdun. Lived here 15 years, then we moved to Greenfield Park and then we moved back. I moved back to Verdun, and I've been here ever since.

**How long have you been the jack of all trades here at the Church?**

Going on two years.

**Okay! Has there been a day in the last 2 years where you've gone home afterwards and shaken your head and thought: "wow that was crazy!"**  
Everyday! Everyday this place is a challenge. This is an old building, and there's a lot of challenges that renovation people will know.

**What's your favorite part?**

Helping people, helping the elders, the parishioners. Father Brian has a vision and I wouldn't mind helping him to achieve his vision of helping the community.

**Besides the Church, what's your favorite part about living in Verdun?**

Oh, the things you can do here. The boardwalk goes all the way out to Dorval, we have a public library, swimming pools, baseball fields, soccer fields, you can get coffee, just general walking around.

**Did you play a lot of pick up hockey when you were a kid on the street?**

Oh yeah! Of course.

**Were you any good?**

Yeah, but not good enough to go to the pros.

**Did you know anyone who made it?**

Yeah, like, semi-pro. But other than that, just a bunch of guys, friends, your mother kicks you out of the house because its too nice outside so back then when I was growing up we didn't have any of that Internet stuff. Now you have phones and stuff...90% of our time was spent outside playing! Not like today. You hardly see the kids out or playing a game of ball. They're taking away the fields for what? To make clean spaces? They're asking the kids to play to be more active, but they're taking away the fields!

**Thanks so much for your time, Gordon. ▶**

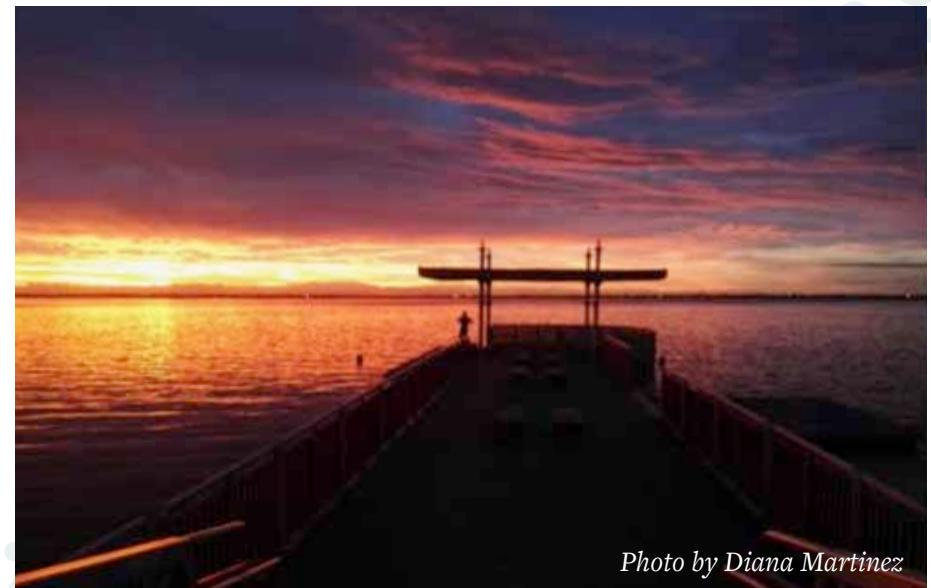


Photo by Diana Martinez

# SIDEWALK SALE STORY

## by Eric Hanson

Sometime in the early 2000s I found myself working at the Verdun sidewalk sale. I was tending a booth for a now-defunct shop that sold rolling paper, pipes, knives, brass knuckles and God-only-knows what else.

That year, the sidewalk sale had a country music theme. The musical program was organized by the Verdun country music association (which I'm pretty sure doesn't exist anymore). There were hay bales and trailer stages set up along Wellington street. The performers were a rotating roster of Verdun-grown "country" music acts, pretty awful overall, but in any case people were having a good time.

Anyways, up on the stage next to my booth were a singing duet, sort of a country music Verdun-style Ian and Sylvia, both wearing cowboy hats and singing over canned music, meaning there was no band.

There was a sizeable crowd gathered around, all loving the show. Everyone was clapping, singing, and dancing (to the best of their respective abilities and disabilities). It was a beautiful sunny saturday in June.

As I half-heartedly tried to hawk my boss's tacky jewelry and grey-market contraband, I was only vaguely aware as of the goings-on of the show. However, on one occasion I did happen to look up from my work, and a man in the crowd caught my eye right away.

He was an older guy with a white crew cut, sitting on a bench, wearing military fatigues. He was swaying back and forth, at first, I thought, to the music. Observing him for a moment more, I then noticed his glazed eyes and unsteady hands. Drifting deep in the nether-regions of drunkenness, this man was not well, and clearly hadn't been for a very long time.

All the while, all around him, hundreds of Verduners clapped and danced to the synthesized country music, the tempo and volume picking up with the song.

At that moment, the man in the military fatigues pitched forward over his shoulder and flopped down onto his back. Out of his jacket pocket fell a large bottle of mouthwash, of which he had evidently consumed at least half. The other half of the green liquid was emptying itself out on the street. The man was now unconscious, possibly dead.

As this was happening, the people directly around him stopped their dancing. A frowning halo of hesitant humanity was forming around the fallen man, with no one quite willing to make the first move to help him. Meanwhile, those who had not yet noticed or who pretended not to see kept on dancing and singing. The country singers, having seen him go down, kept on with the show, desperately shooting each other "what the hell do we do?" looks.

Finally, a young man from the crowd broke the seal, bending down to check his breathing. Evidently not reassured by what he saw, he began gesticulating to another by-standard, evidently petitioning them to do something, call 911. More and more people were now defecting from watching the show to watching this man die on the sidewalk.

The singers, however, still did not take this as a cue to quit. Finishing one song, they promptly started another one, earning themselves a smattering of applause from the seven or eight die-hard country fans still oblivious to what was going on behind them.

Those crowded around the dying man seemed to be engaged in a worldless drawing of straws: their eyes pleading with one another for *someone* to step forward and take the lead. *Someone* would have to perform CPR on this man, nobody wanted to. The cracked, bleeding lips of the man in the army fatigues did not present an appealing mouth-to-mouth scenario, mouthwash or no mouthwash. This awkward moment lasted three beats too long.

At that moment, the wailing of an ambulance announced that responsible grown-ups were here to take over. The ambulance plowed through the sea of slack-jawed gawkers (myself included) and immediately dispersed this weird and uncomfortable scene. The music cut out, the musicians left the stage, and the paramedics loaded the man away onto a stretcher. His bottle of mouthwash, I noticed, was still on the ground.

The ambulance drove away, leaving an empty wake in the crowd.

As soon as it was out of sight, the people left standing in street moved as if as one to the surrounding vendor's booths, and started to buy things. My booth made more in sales in the following 15 minutes than it had all morning. This was almost 20 years ago, and the whole thing still doesn't make sense to me, but it happened. True story. 

**Artwork by  
BEVERLEY LANDRY**

Beverley Landry is a local artist. We asked her if she had anything that she would like to contribute to our magazine and she was gracious enough to not only share this wonderful piece, but to also give some insight into her inspiration behind it.

What can be more inspiring to an artist than an up-close observation of one's subject matter? I have had the great fortune of living in Verdun for many years. Walking the trails of the riverfront, exploring the various green areas and discovering the magnificence of the various species of birds, insects, amphibians, trees and wildflowers. My passion for birds actually began with my first sighting of a Great Blue Heron flying at eye level over the St-Lawrence in Verdun. Since then, I have been utterly inspired by their beauty and behaviour. Having the opportunity to live in such close proximity to nature while existing in a large metropolitan city is a gift. Verdun is an exceptional location and my art will continue to reflect this ever evolving relationship. ▶



**BROTHERS**  
**By Andrew Jefferson**

After running a recess soccer group at an elementary school my colleague and I arrived at the top floor with one of the young players slow in tow. He was the goalie and it didn't go very well. A lot of goals were scored and he had been crying the entire walk up.

We gave him a few of the well worn lines such as, "it's not about winning, it's about trying your best", and "you'll get them next time." Unsurprisingly it didn't help. We were all about to go our separate ways before I noticed that he had his shoes on "backwards."

This wasn't at all unusual. During soccer shoes were often on the wrong feet, or untied to the point of flying off, or too big to the point of flying off (sometimes in the goal).

We all had somewhere to be, but my colleague and I jumped at the opportunity to suggest that it wasn't his lack of coordination and fear of the ball that contributed to his humiliation, but more the fact he had his shoes on backwards. "Ah....look, there's the problem!" We wanted him to understand that in our book he was off the hook. It seemed to work. We all laughed a bit and the kid stopped crying.

So we sat there talking while he put his shoes on correctly. A short time later we looked down at the boy and to our surprise his shoes were still on backwards. I couldn't help but chuckle as my colleague impatiently pointed out to the boy that his shoes were still backwards. To be honest we were all a bit confused by the situation. Once again we returned to talking about the Habs or some other bull. When we finally looked down to check on the boy, to our horror his shoes were still backwards! My colleagues eyes were bulging and he was at a loss for words.

Gratefully the answer dawned on me before all of our brains burst. In the morning hussle he must of grabbed two of the same shoe! Of course. He had like seven brothers or something.

After a good laugh, we sent him back to class and went to find his brothers. ▶

## RICHARD BEAN

For Richard Bean, a magnifying glass is his paintbrush and sunlight is his palette. Mr. Bean is an artist in Verdun who draws in a way you've probably never imagined. He uses sunlight to burn his drawings into wood pieces with a magnifying glass.

An average piece takes him approximately eight 7-8 hour days to create. We were lucky to watch him "burn" one day. Sitting on a park bench, with his sunglasses on, he focuses the magnifying glass on a spot in the wood and gets the light to catch it just right. He moves the glass carefully to draw a line and line after line, he creates picture after incredible picture. Richard Bean is truly an original artist. Yet, he draws inspiration from Verdun. As he walks through the streets and looks up toward the trees, he sees the shapes and outlines of his next drawings.

Mr. Bean's art is also inspired by his own ideas of what he would like to see around him. "When I draw, I'm taking something from the back of my mind that I want to see in front of me". By virtue of bringing his ideas to life, we get to watch him draw the world around us. His art is a new lens we can view Verdun through.

Mr. Bean has been making art for over 50 years and doesn't intend on stopping any time soon. "When people ask me what kind of art I do, I just

### PEOPLE OF VERDUN 4



reply, "I do art—any art—just leave me a nail and I'll scratch a drawing in the wall". In reality, he doesn't need much more than his magnifying glass to create something beautiful. Even the sun watches in awe and shines more brightly when he's working. ▼

## VERDUN, MY HOME 1

By Diana Martinez

Arriving like a boom!  
the welcome was unknown,  
but the sun told me the truth,  
Verdun was going to be my home.

*Dedicated to the sun every morning, thank you for listen my prayers, for give me calm and energy to start my day everyday. ▼*

# THE WHITE DRESS

## By Amanda L'esperance

What a Goddamned night.

It started when I almost killed some broad and then got soaking wet. I was on my way home from work when it started to rain cats and dogs. I could barely see a foot ahead, but I was almost halfway home when this broad appeared out of nowhere and nearly scared the specter out of me. I swerved to avoid running over her, I lost total control, and I put the car into a ditch.

When I crashed, I smashed my head on the steering wheel. I felt nauseous, and in a panic, I tried to exit the car, but when I did I fell face first in the mud.

Lying there, I remembered it was the woman's fault for this, but even though she caused it, I felt bad and invited her to come back into the car with me. She spoke to me then. She didn't ask how I was, or say sorry, but instead she said, "I hope I didn't scare you".

She did scare me, but I couldn't let her know that.

She came in and her white dress covered my seat in mud. She told me her boyfriend left her on the road and right away we started to argue. I told her she looked cold, but she kept going on and on about how she wasn't. She had her arms crossed. She was shivering and I offered her my coat, but she said no. I thought to myself, come on, just admit it and take my damn coat.

For some reason we started talking about watches. She told me she doesn't wear them because they always break because of her body chemistry.

I think what's really broke is her head. I think I now know why her boyfriend won't come back for her. I know I wouldn't. Something is off about her.

Next thing she tells me is her name is Marla. Then she asks me a bunch of questions and starts prying into my life. She asks if I'm married and she says she wants to know so that she can be sure I'm not a creep. She says she always compared other men to her boyfriend who she says is such a great guy. The same guy who left her by the side of the road in the rain.

I really understand why her boyfriend left her on the side of the road.

Then she really started. She was the one who called me a creep and she was the one who got me into this mess, but then she pushed it too far. Then she started saying that it was possible for her to kill me and to eat my liver with salt. That's the thing that really got me. Imagine, eating a liver with salt.

Everyone knows you eat it with pepper. She tasted pretty good. Like I said, it was a hell of a Goddamned night. ▾



Photo by Elisabeth Badertscher

## POWERLESS by Kortanie Raye

This is how I feel  
For so long I was control  
Falling in and out of depression tendencies is challenging  
They creep up on you  
You don't even see it coming  
It takes over your body  
Almost as if it's a demon trying to replace your soul  
Dark thoughts come to the forefront  
Every muscle in your body aches  
Exhaustion drowning your mind and physical  
Long silences deep within  
I don't like when it creeps in  
So I'll go back in my corner and put my guard up  
Keeping myself in mind I will water my own garden instead of others gardens  
Often I lose sight of myself  
Probably because I can't see myself, only when I look in the mirror in the morning  
It almost feels as if I'm here for others but people can't be helped if I can't even help myself.  
I need to force myself to eat and shower and make my hair pretty.  
Forget the makeup who has any time for that anyway?  
I have to force myself to go to work and make my lunch.  
I know it sounds so easy but why is it so hard for me today when the other day I was fine?  
Life is tougher than it seems  
Because people live lies instead of what it actually is.  
People live comfortably with all these illusions  
But being one who sees it all, it's not so confusing  
But it's makin me go crazy because nobody but me and a couple other people see it  
Today's minds are so oblivious  
I don't even waste my time explaining the obvious  
Knowledge is power but what is your knowledge when nobody else believes you? ▼



## VERDUN: A MONTREAL BOROUGH WITH A RICH SCOTTISH PAST

BY OLIVIA KURAJIAN

When you think of insurance plans, you may think of policies that are difficult to navigate or the ideas of "beneficiaries" and "policyholders". You probably did not think of the Montreal borough of Verdun and a Scottish presence in Quebec.

However, the history of Verdun over the past 150 years is intimately related to both Scottish immigration to Quebec and insurance policies. The Sons of Scotland Benevolent Association (SOSBA) was established in 1876 in Toronto as a male-only fraternal association aimed at supporting Scottish immigrants to Canada. This Association was charged with the duty of providing various types of insurance policies to Scottish newcomers to Canada. Furthermore, insurance plans were created to aid the sick, poor, widowed, and orphaned members of the Canadian-Scottish community. These plans also served as a level of economic security for

Scottish communities in the case of the death of loved ones. The plight of immigrants was often partially alleviated through these programs. Women were especially supported through these plans as widows or mothers. Despite not being able to claim official membership until 1909 they had played an exclusive role in the Association since its beginning.

Additionally, it encouraged retention of Scottish culture in the Dominion of Canada through membership in the various ‘camps’, or district groups, and various events hosted by the Association. SOSBA emphasized the importance of retaining this strong sense of Scottish culture amongst immigrants and their posterity while celebrating the uniqueness of their Canadian experience. A focus of Scottish dress, customs, sports, history, music and literature aimed to maintain a Scottish spirit in the Great White North.

In the early 1900s, there were five camps in the Montreal area. These various camps met in places like the Legion in order to conduct monthly

meetings. The first Scottish Centre, bearing the name, Invergordon Scottish Centre, was located on Stanley Street, downtown Montreal. Yet, after several events that required relocation, the Sons of Scotland camps were on the hunt for a more permanent location. Thus, with so many members of the SOSBA residing in Verdun

and the Sud-Ouest of Montreal, it seemed logical to institute a Centre in this popular area.

In June 1989, a property located at 1610 Stephens Avenue was found in Verdun. Because of financial difficulties, the Sons of Scotland Benevolent



Sons of Scotland Benevolent Association Realia, housed at McGill University’s Rare Books and Special Collections. (Photo taken by author)

Association actually purchased the property and leased it to the Scottish Centre; an entity in its own right.

Sadly, the Scottish Centre closed its doors on January 8, 2018. Yet, this closure does not mean an end for the Scottish presence in Verdun, as generations of Scots are still tirelessly active in their families, networks, and community.

If you are curious to learn more about SOSBA, The Scottish Centre, or the Scottish history of Verdun, McGill University’s Archives will be made publicly available and searchable through the collection number MSG 1205 and MSG 1206". v

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## A TRACE OF ASSERTIVENESS

### By Thaiz de Lopez

One beautiful morning by July in Verdun there was a girl who was very enthusiastic about going to summer school.

She was about six years old and she used to go to every place with her mother, her grandmother, and her aunt.

She was the only child living in a world of adults.

So.... on that morning she had to go to the summer school by 9 a.m. It was getting late but no one was ready. Then, she told her grandmother, “I have made the way sometimes with you, but in order to be on time, I’m going to walk by myself!”

The grandmother open her eyes big but she was a very cheerful person and said, “Well if you feel capable of doing that... do that!”

The girl who was already dressed began her way, and imagine what happened?

She got lost!

She felt bad for a few minutes but she trusted herself and she found her way to school.

So she accomplished her goal by herself. v

# LISE BRUNEAU

## PEOPLE OF VERDUN 5

Lise Bruneau has been through an interview like this before. As she enters her 51st year at the Salon Gaetane Hair Salon, Lise was once again generous with her time as she shared some of her perceptions and memories of Verdun with us.

*Editor's note: We were interrupted a few times throughout our chat, which is to be expected when sitting with Lise. The door to the salon not only opens with folks coming in for a cut or style. More often than not, its someone from the neighborhood who just wants to say hello, fill Lise in on some news, or exchange a few words of encouragement. By the end of our 90 minutes together, we felt we had only gotten started, but we think that's part of what makes the salon so special: it really is a community hub and there is no thought to any conversation ever really being complete. There is simply a constant feeling of 'see you again soon'.*

### ***Lise, where are you from originally?***

Huntington, Quebec, which is close to the us border. You can walk there from where we live. My brother is actually the mayor of the town.

### ***And you're something of an unofficial mayor of Verdun. Lise, when did you decide you wanted to be a hairdresser?***

When I was in Huntington, there was a beauty parlour there. I was in high school at the time. They asked me if I wanted a job as a hair washer and that's how I first started. After I finished high school I came to Montreal and attended the Art Institute of Hairdressing. At first I travelled there every day from Huntington, but when the winter came it got too cold so I took a room at a boarding house on Cote St. Catherine called Marie Goritti. There was a salon called Salon Lonchamps next to the beauty school and that's where I got my first job washing hair.

### ***When did you first open the salon?***

I didn't. The salon has been opened since the 40's. It was a girlfriend of mine who was working here when it was called the Mademoiselle de Paris, and before that it was called Salon Dorothy, then Mademoiselle de Paris, then Salon Crystal. After that it changed to what it still is now, Salon Gaetan, in roughly 1968. My friend had to move back to Trois Rivieres to get married and she asked if I could take her place. That was in 1967. I've been here ever since.

### ***And when did you become the owner?***

I bought the business in 1988.

### ***Why?***

The previous owner couldn't keep it. At first I didn't want it because I thought it would be a lot of responsibility, but then after I thought about it, I said, why not.

### ***So you've been here since 1967, became the owner since 88, and still own it to this day. With this in mind, How has Verdun changed in your view?***

It has changed so much. I don't have any older people coming in here anymore. I see a younger generation of people. There were also more families in past times, but I think a lot of the young people here now are more on their own. I think I have a bit of trouble adapting to the younger people now. I know it's important that the they are moving in and that there are more boutiques and restaurants, but like I said, there used to be more families living here.

### ***How do you think this has impacted seniors in the community?***

I find is that a lot of our seniors are having to move into homes. Not as many of them are being taken care of anymore.

### ***Was there a particular time when Verdun was difficult?***

The 80's were hard. Verdun was tough back then. They were also tearing up Wellington street. I was getting my water from a customer who lived on 1st avenue. I would bring it back here in buckets to use in the salon.

### ***How do you see yourself here as a member of the community.***

Well I do a lot. I volunteer in a lot of places on my days off. I've volunteered for years at the Douglas Hospital and various seniors homes. I do a lot of

that work on my days off. In fact tonight, I'm going to a senior home and I'll also go to the Verdun Hospital to do hair.

#### **Any regrets?**

Sometimes I feel like a psychiatrist, mother, father. Sometimes I hear some hard stories, but I believe in being positive and that being positive makes positive. I love when the children come in to hug me and call me *Tante Lise*. So definitely no regrets.

#### ***Is there a particular story that stands out for you over all these years?***

That's easy. I met my husband, Richard, of 35 years here. His mother was a customer and one day she came in for a wash and told me her son was also single. I Went for supper at his place when he was still living with his mother. We went out, got engaged, and got married all in one year.

***Thanks so much for this, Lise. I think we should end this chat by saying again that you have given this salon and community 51 years. I'm sure you've been asked this question before, but how long do you think you'll continue? Do you ever get tired of the job?***

All I can say to that is that this feels like it's my house, it's my life. ▶

## **VERDUN, MY HOME 2**

### **By Diana Martinez**

Thomas and Kasy  
Are a Little bit crazy,  
I saw their hearts  
And now I know, how special  
they are

*Dedicated to my first friends in  
Verdun, Thomas and Cassie (Kasy)  
you always give light to my life. ▶*



## **THE FAIR**

### **by Sarah Vresk**

I went to the town fair every year with my family. It wasn't so much for the fun of it as it was expected of me. We had the largest dairy farm in the county, and every one of us kids had to work the booths at the stable, either showing the cows or helping my mother sell cheese at the concession. I was the oldest and was expected to help out the most, so when the little ones were allowed to spend a couple hours on the midway, I always stayed behind to man the stalls.

There wasn't much to it, just keeping the cows watered and calm, shoveling out manure and replacing it with fresh hay. I'd answer the town folks' questions about milking and feeding, and show little kids how to pet a cow's nose. My dad was pretty well known in town, and some of the men would ask after him. It wasn't so hard really, but it wasn't any fun either. Every year I'd watch the people from town stroll through the exhibits, not knowing the difference between one cow and the next, their kids complaining about the smell. I'd see girls I knew from school dressed in their summer dresses and I'd wish I weren't in my mud and manure stained overalls. They weren't exactly my friends, these girls, because I didn't have many of those, but they were polite and made small talk when they passed the exhibit. What interest the cows held for those town girls I never knew, and I always wondered if they were really there just to see what a farm girl looked like in all her muck and hay filled glory. I didn't hold it against them, not really, but I wished just once they'd ask me if when I was done working, would I join them on the Ferris wheel?

Anyhow, by the time I was 15, I'd just about had it. I was adamant that this year, I would not spend the entire fair cooped up in the stalls. I argued with my mother over and over. My side of the argument was that my brother Silas was old to enough to handle the exhibit on his own. My mother's side was that I had a duty to this family and I was expected to carry it through. I said it wasn't fair that I was always stuck doing all the work. She said life wasn't about fair and if I thought I was doing a lot of work now, she could fix it so I knew what real work was. Arguing with my mother was never a wise or successful thing to do, and so there I was, the Friday night of the fair, shoveling manure out of the exhibits. The only part

of the argument I'd won was that Silas was stuck there with me, and he wasn't too happy about it.

Silas was ignoring me as best he could in the small quarters of the stall. Mostly he stuck with the cows, leaving me to deal with the town people. I was talking to the local pharmacist when out of the corner of my eye I saw Tammy, a girl I knew from school, at the other end of the barn. She was talking to another farmer, who pointed down the aisle at me. Tammy turned her head. Her eyes settled on me and she smiled and started walking towards me.

Tammy was new in town. She moved from the city halfway through the school year so her father could open a law office in the town square. That first day she came to class, she wore pants when all the girls still wore dresses and skirts. She could've been friends with anyone, but she hadn't attached herself to any particular group. Everyone liked her, even the teachers, and she talked to everyone in the same easy way, looking you right in the eye and really listening to what you said. She asked and answered questions in class like she was having a conversation. Even the boys thought she was alright. I'd spoken with her a few times, but nothing more than pleasantries. I had no idea why she was walking down the barn towards me.

When she reached me, she waited until I had finished with the pharmacist and then she smiled and said, "Hey Mary. I heard I'd find you here."

"Hi Tammy. Yeah, I'm always here," I said, wiping my hands down my overalls. Tammy was wearing overalls too, but they were short and feminine, and she had a white blouse underneath them. They weren't stained and they didn't smell like cow dung and hay. "What can I do for you?"

"Well I've never been to a fair before, and it looks like fun. I was wondering if you wouldn't mind joining me on the midway?" I heard Silas grunt behind me. He was watching us talk but looking at the cows.

"Right now? I don't know, I mean..." I turned and motioned to the stall behind me. Tammy looked past me and took in the cows as if for the first time.

"Don't you get a break or something?" She stepped around me and spoke to Silas. "You can look after things while your sister comes with me, can't you?" Silas grunted again and crossed his arms. Tammy just smiled at him. "I think you have it under control." To me, she winked and said, "Come on."

I laughed and looked down at my clothes. "I'm not exactly dressed for it..."

Tammy laughed too and patted the bag hanging from her shoulder.

"I brought you something to wear," she said, looking me up and down. "We're around the same size." I didn't know what to say. I wanted to go with her, but I knew what I'd be in for if I did. She stood there waiting, smiling at me like we were in some conspiracy together. She had come here just to find me, she had even brought clothes for me. No one had ever done anything like that for me before. How could I say no? She held out her arm and I took it, and we started off.

"I'm telling Ma you left me here!" Silas shouted after me. "Mary! I'm telling!"

"I know you will!" I called back, and Tammy giggled, and I started giggling and a nervous thrill rushed through me. I started running and Tammy caught up and we ran the length of the barn.

Around the back of the barn I changed out of my overalls while Tammy kept watch. She'd brought me a white skirt and a red and white-checkered shirt with a frilled collar. The skirt stopped just above my knees and was the shortest I'd ever worn before. The shirt was short sleeved and my skinny arms looked pale in the night air. When I was dressed Tammy turned around.

"Don't you look cute! But wait just a second," Tammy leaned forward and pulled the shirtsleeves off my shoulders. Then she reached up and pulled my hair out of its ponytail and shook her fingers through it. "Perfect. Now you're ready." We stuffed my overalls into her bag and stashed them in a bush at the back of the barn.

She took my arm again and we headed for the midway.

I didn't have any money for games or rides, but Tammy insisted that it was her treat. She'd had a job in the city and had money of her own, and she'd invited me. We played a few games and turns out I was pretty good at darts and I won a small stuffed elephant. Tammy was good at tossing little rings around the necks of bottles and won a cheap plastic bracelet. She put it on and showed it off to me and we laughed. On the Ferris wheel, Tammy got nervous when it stopped at the top and the cart started rocking back and forth. She was funny when she was nervous. She kept laughing and asking when they were going to let us down. She'd look over the side and swear and I couldn't help laughing with her.

After the Ferris wheel Tammy wasn't too keen on trying any more rides, so we just walked up and down the midway. We passed the grandstand. We

could hear the muffled tinny voice of the announcer over the loudspeaker. People were filing into the grandstand and finding seats.

“What’s that place for?” Tammy asked.

“The derby.”

“What’s a derby?”

“A horse race.”

“Oh I definitely want to see that.” Tammy turned and grinned at me. “I’ve never been up close to a horse before.”

“Well you can’t get too close here either. You just watch from the bleachers.”

“I know silly, but let’s go anyway.” Tammy took my hand and we joined the crowd of people climbing the stairs to the bleachers.

We watched a few races and Tammy was fascinated by the horses. She kept calling them poetry. She really never had seen horses up close before and she clapped like a little kid every time they raced by.

“You know my family has a couple horses,” I said. “They’re not like these ones, just farm horses, but you could come and ride one if you want.”

“Oh wow, that would be amazing! I’d really like that, Mary.” She was eating a candy apple and her lips were stained bright red. She stood up to cheer as her favourite horse galloped past, waving her apple in the air. When she sat down again she held the apple out to me. “Would you mind holding this for a minute? I’m going to run to the ladies’ room.”

“Sure,” I said, and took the apple by the stick. Tammy picked her way through the legs of the spectators and down to the stairs, where she disappeared around the corner.

The race we were watching finished. Tammy’s horse had won. The announcer’s voice blasted over the loudspeaker, calling out the names of the horses in the next race. That race began. I twirled Tammy’s candy apple in my fingers and scanned the crowd. I saw a few faces I recognized, but most were strangers. One race finished and another began. Tammy didn’t come back. I watched another race. And another. I sat and twirled the candy apple and Tammy didn’t come back.

I watched the corner where Tammy had gone down the stairs but she didn’t appear. I couldn’t watch the races anymore and I just watched for her. I didn’t know whether to keep waiting or to go look for her. My back was stiff from sitting on the bleachers and my bare shoulders felt cold and exposed. Finally I stood up and made my way through the crowd. My legs tingled as I stepped around knees and feet.

I reached the bottom of the stairs and headed for the bathrooms. The restrooms were built into the sides of the grandstand, the men’s on one wall and the women’s on the opposite. There was a police officer standing in front of the entrance to the ladies room, his arms crossed across his chest. A small crowd of people had gathered against the wall of the men’s room. They were watching the police officer and whispering.

I approached the women’s washroom and the policeman held his arms out, blocking me.

“You can’t go in there, miss,” he said. “This is a crime scene.” At first his words didn’t make sense. They were so foreign, so unexpected.

“What?” I blurted out.

“You can’t use this bathroom. You’ll have to find another one.”

“My friend,” I said, the words choking out of me.

“What’s that?” the officer said, leaning towards me.

“My friend went in there.”

The policeman narrowed his eyes. “How old is your friend?”

“My age. Fifteen.”

“Can you tell me what she was wearing?”

I told him, and he asked me to wait right there and he stepped inside the bathroom. As the door swung open, I could see more policemen inside, standing over something on the floor. When the officer came back out, a man in a suit came with him. The man said he was a detective and would I please come with him somewhere we could talk.

I followed the detective to the bingo tent, which had been emptied out and closed. He sat down at one of the tables and asked me to sit down too. He took a pad from his back pocket and a pen from his jacket. He asked me my name and address, and Tammy’s name and address. I didn’t know her address but I told him her father was the new lawyer in town. He said that was fine, he would be able to locate her family with that information. I asked why did he need to locate her family and he asked me to describe Tammy. I did and then he told me he had some terrible news. His voice was gentle as he told me that a girl had been attacked and killed in the women’s washroom and he was pretty sure that girl was Tammy. He said some more gentle words, something about how difficult this must be, but I couldn’t really hear them. It was absurd, sitting there on a plastic chair in the darkened bingo tent, staring over this man’s shoulder, looking at the bingo prizes hanging on the wall, kitchen mixers and teddy bears and a camping set. None of

this had anything to do with me, all of it was so far removed from my life of cows and hay-baling and school work. I felt a numbness come over me and my insides seemed to solidify and I heard the detective say he had some questions for me.

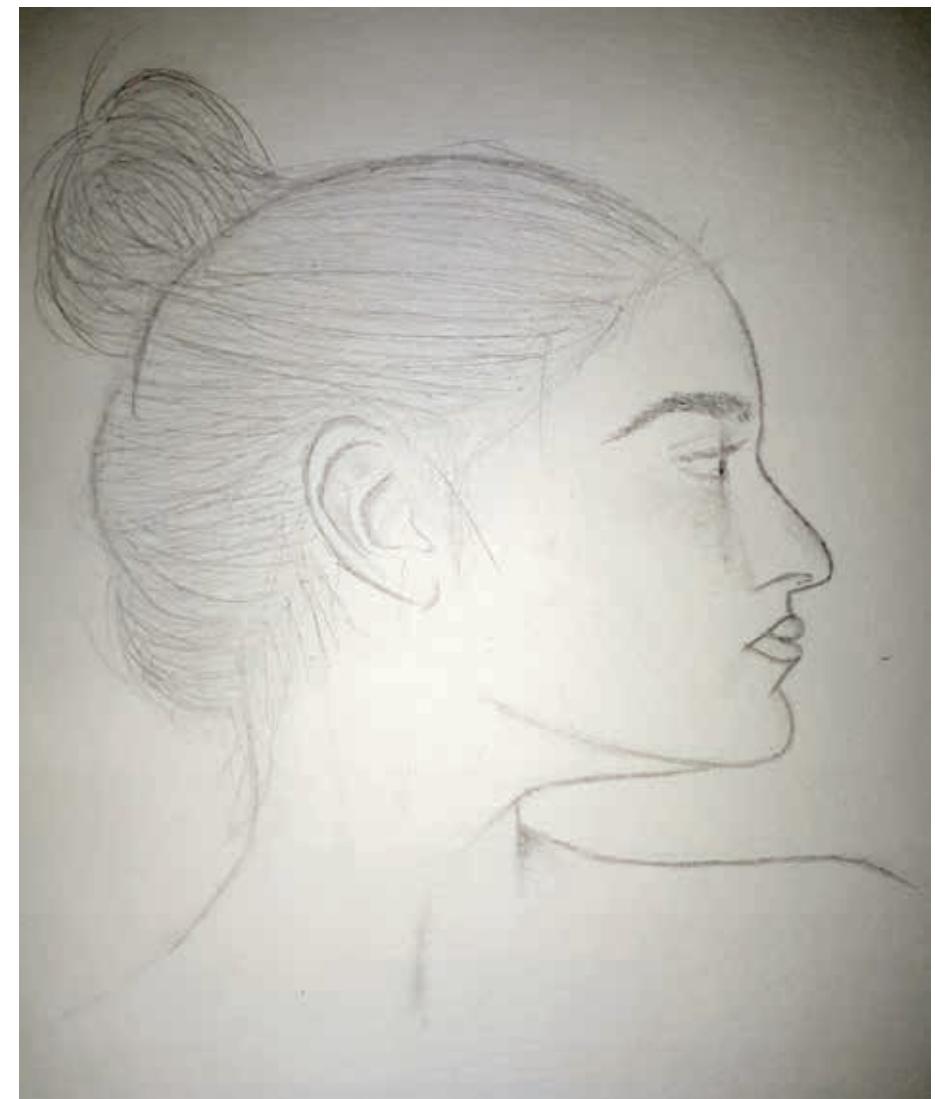
He asked me what Tammy and I had done that night. I told him about the games and the Ferris wheel and how we went to watch the derby. Tammy went to the bathroom and never came back. Had I noticed anyone following us? Did we get into an argument with anyone? I hadn't seen anything like that. Did Tammy have any enemies? I told him that in all truth I didn't really know Tammy that well, so I couldn't say. He asked me how long Tammy had been gone before I went looking for her, and I didn't know that either. Everything he asked me, I answered, the words coming out of my mouth as if from the pit of my stomach, each syllable dredging itself up out of my throat and into the air.

After we finished talking the detective told me he'd fetch someone to drive me home. I sat and stared at the bingo prizes. There were spaces on the wall where someone had won a prize and it hadn't been replaced yet. I tried to guess what prizes the empty spaces had been but it was hard to tell. It was a strange thought to have, and I tried to think of Tammy but my mind couldn't settle on her. In my head her face was blurred, her features unclear, like a photograph underwater. All I could see was her candy apple stained mouth.

Finally a uniformed officer came to take me home. My mother was waiting at the door when I got there. The first thing she asked me was where the hell had I been and what in God's name was I wearing? Where had my overalls got to and what was I thinking taking off like that? She started to pull me inside by the arm and then saw the officer waiting behind me. Her fingers gripped my arm tighter and she asked me what was going on. The officer asked if he could have a word with her, and she stepped forward to speak with him on the porch. I went inside and stood in the hall at the entrance to the kitchen. The house was dark except for the small light over the stove.

When my mother came back inside she shut the door and leaned against it for a moment. In the dark I couldn't see the expression on her face. She came forward and put her hands on my wrists, clutching them gently. She asked me if I wanted anything, and I said no, and she told me I had better get on up to bed.

In my room I undressed and laid the clothes out on my bed. The outfit Tammy had chosen for me was wrinkled from the movement of my body. A small red streak stained the white skirt. It was then I remembered my overalls were still in Tammy's bag, in the bush behind the barn. [v](#)



Artwork by Sydney Melek

## VERDUN

by Sandra MacDonald

Growing up in Verdun was very difficult at times, during the fifties. Money was tight, some families struggled. We pushed through those tough times on a diet of Campbell soup and hamburgers. Occasionally, usually on a Friday, we were sent to pick up some fish and chips wrapped in newspaper, from the shop on Bannatyne Ave. You'd carry it home with the tempting scent seeping through the paper. It was a special, but rare treat. Money was scarce. We made do.

Having little in the way of extra money meant finding things to do that didn't cost. We knew our parents struggled to make ends meet and didn't dare ask for more than they could give. The ballet classes were out. We had our community center. To this day, the hours spent at the Dawson Boys club, are deeply embedded in my memory. So many groups and clubs were offered to us, free of charge. I spent half my childhood there, taking gymnastics, badminton, art classes and more. I belonged to the Glee club and to this day still recall all the old songs we sang. Friday and Saturday nights weren't spent wandering the streets. We had pre-teen dances and teen dances. I went to every dance from nine years old to sixteen. You felt part of a great community; it was your community center. Such a huge part of my growing up.

The picture I sent was from a costume dance my sister and I attended at Dawson. Our mother spent hours making our costumes; using one of her own skirts to make my sisters upside down dress. I do believe we won the contest...well we had our photos in the local paper....How special was that! Growing up in Verdun; I wouldn't change it for the world... ▼

## Holiday At Camp Mars



(Gazette Photo Service)

**CRAZY FASHIONS:** Fashion commentator **Claudia MacDonald, 13,** scrutinizes an outfit she later had to describe in the fashion show put on by the 11 to 14-year-old girls now at the Dawson Boys' Club day-camp in Verdun. The flapper costume is worn by her sister

**Sandra, 11.** The girls turned up in everything from pyjamas to beatnik garb. Claudia's ensemble included a hoop worn upside down. The fashion show is one of many and varied projects planned for the 200 children attending the day camp.



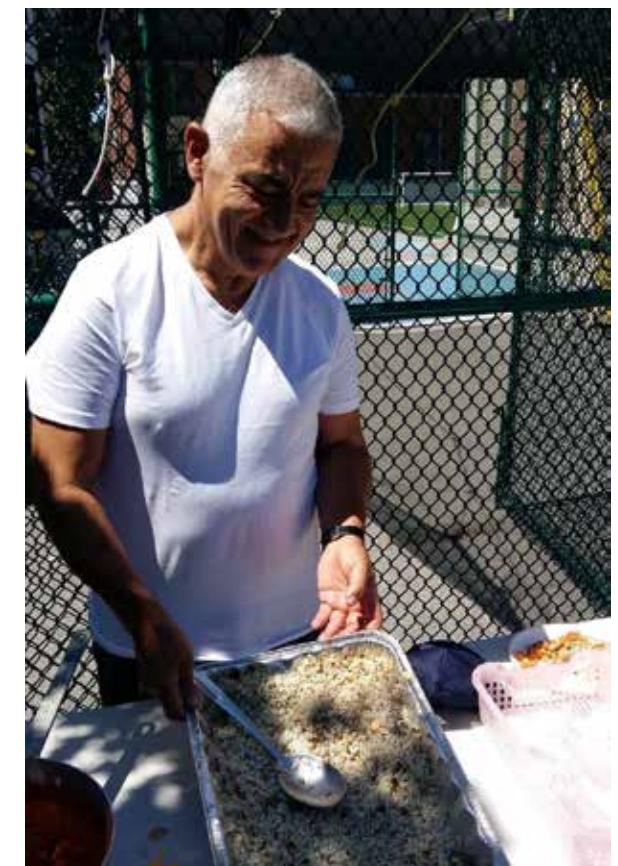
Photo by Elisabeth Badertscher

## THE PERFECT RECIPE

### Habib's First 6 Months in Verdun

All it took was a couple days for Habib Hachem to fall in love with Verdun. Although he has lived in Canada for 25 years, he only moved here six months ago. For most, this time would be spent testing the waters of the city but not in Habib's case. He has found joy in exploring every corner and edge of Verdun life. The mix of city life and scenery makes for a perfect place to meet new people, go on walks and pursue new adventures. He says that, "At 50, many people stop living but I find that the more I age, the more I have the urge to continue living life to the fullest". He hopes to inspire all of his friends to do the same. In exploring the city, he continues to meet those friends and find communities of people from different backgrounds who share his same sense of joie de vivre. He celebrates the joys of Verdun life with them and stays with them through the harder moments.

When we met him at the Southwest Mission this past summer, he was serving everyone the lunch he had made: Riz de Salma. It was a meal in honour of his ex-wife who had just passed away a couple days prior to the lunch. Despite the sadness of





the loss, Habib decided that the best way to pay tribute to her was to give back to the community and share the delicious recipe. When we asked him for the recipe later, he described the process of frying up some chicken, roasting some almonds, sauteeing them in butter, salt, pepper, cumin, and mixing all the rice together. However, he seldom follows recipes nowadays. Cooking, for him, is a matter of intuition and love for those he's cooking for. And anyway, sometimes the best recipes keep space for the spontaneous.

When we later spoke, he said, "Have faith in life. Don't let age stop you because the truth is, you can do anything you put your mind to—you just have to believe in yourself." The importance is to keep moving forward. Habib continues to bring life to Verdun and through it all, he infuses everything he does with a spirit of hope and energy for what's to come—a perfect recipe. ▶

## KAHWENN by Kortanie Raye

An unsettling feeling follows me today, it's a challenge considering you're all alone in your world. Ok there are people who are "there" however physically speaking, they are not. There's a sense of comfort when there is another trusted body around. But what do you do when your options are limited? I'm seeing a whole other world that doesn't consist of the same people of today. People come and go and the worst is the people who are there physically but not mentally. I'm not talking about the 'not all there folks', but the ones who say they're there but their head isn't in your game of life. The ones who just can't wrap their brain around the idea of you. Those ones. There's many, I'm coming to find out, but boy am I not ready to fully stick myself out there yet. It's a scary world in which reminds you of yourself all the time in every action you do. It's just up to you whether you'd like to see it or not.

And still I rise

It's possible to go too far into your own world. Creating very risky situations. Don't forget to stay grounded, seek reality at all times just to give you a friendly reminder that you shouldn't make any important decision as yet. Go with the flow and don't expect anything. Live the moment.

It's conflicting, I know.

Wanting not to be alone

Thinking everything is bliss when in the presence of one

Wanting to satisfy your needs

Your wants.

But at the end of the day you go back to yourself.

If you're able to live with yourself you're doing ok

If not, and you have a significant other to "complete you", step back and observe. See what you could be doing better, nobody can complete ourselves except for us. It's not in anybody else's hands to complete us as a person.

There's always room for improvement in this imperfect world. ▶

# THE VERDUN STORIES

2019