

2016

# All We Are is All We Were: the Bridge and Blight of Sandwich Towne

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All We Are is All We Were:  
the Bridge and Blight of Sandwich Towne

by

Jason Rankin

A Creative Writing Project  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the Department of English Language,  
Literature and Creative Writing  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts  
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2016

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the Bridge and Blight of Sandwich Towne

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April 20, 2016

## **DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY**

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication.

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, my thesis does not infringe upon anyone's copyright nor violate any proprietary rights and that any ideas, techniques, quotations, or any other material from the work of other people included in my thesis, published or otherwise, are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices. Furthermore, to the extent that I have included copyrighted material that surpasses the bounds of fair dealing within the meaning of the Canada Copyright Act, I certify that I have obtained a written permission from the copyright owner(s) to include such material(s) in my thesis and have included copies of such copyright clearances to my appendix.

I declare that this is a true copy of my thesis, including any final revisions, as approved by my thesis committee and the Graduate Studies office, and that this thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

## **ABSTRACT**

In Windsor, Ontario there is a historic community known as Sandwich Towne that is currently being destroyed by a single man: Matty Moroun. He owns the Ambassador Bridge, the busiest border crossing in North America, as well as a stretch of more than 110 abandoned houses running parallel to the bridge. Moroun plans to knock houses down and building a second bridge to Detroit, despite the fact that the Canadian government is already building their own span.

*All We Are is All We Were: the Bridge and Blight of Sandwich Towne* is a creative nonfiction exploration of this community stricken with urban blight. Through using a combination of prose and comics storytelling, the work not only serves to tell the tale of walking through and talking to residents in Sandwich, but also embodies the conflict between objective and subjective telling of “truth” in a work of creative nonfiction.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this to Zeus,  
whose godly meow woke me up to write each morning,  
and to my sister,  
because you're in this with me

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Foremost, I would like to express extreme gratitude to my advisor Dr. Dale Jacobs for continually supporting me with my thesis. Without his guidance and creative nonfiction prowess, this would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Dr. Luft for chairing my defence, as well as the rest of the thesis committee, Dr. Susan Holbrook and Dr. John Sutcliffe, for questions and comments that help me to build this work.

A special thanks to the several creative writing instructors I've had throughout my time at the University of Windsor who taught me how to craft writing worth reading: Dr. Nicole Markotić, Dr. Louis Cabri and Marty Gervais. Also, thank you to Craig Pearson and Blake Roberts for teaching me how to write and work within the field of journalism, as well as to love it. I thank several of my peers in the English MA program for support and discussion throughout this project, as well as agreeing to be plot devices. Thanks to Hannah Watts for helping me look over my work and remove my grammatical stutters. Thank you to Jeremy Johnston and Amilcar Nogueira for the conversation, support and tears (beers) shared, as we all went through this thesis journey together.

Lastly, I would like to thank family. Ma and Pa, without you I obviously would not be able to write anything. And I would like to thank my little sister, who moved from Scugog Island to Sandwich last September and is now, forever, in my thesis—ha. And Zeus, I know you can't read this, but thank you for keeping me company, jumping in my lap and asking me to pay attention to you, even past midnight while punching out pages for this project. You kept me sane.

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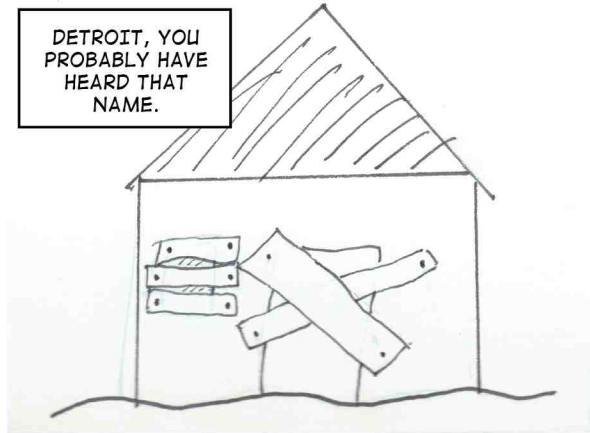


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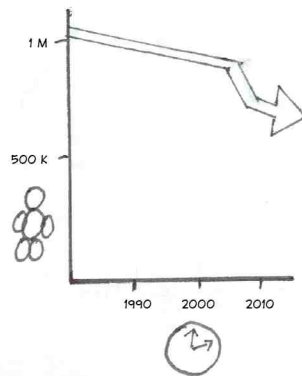


THIS IS WHERE A TRUE  
STORY STARTS

DETROIT, YOU  
PROBABLY HAVE  
HEARD THAT  
NAME.



IT'S A CITY THAT  
HAS LOST A  
LARGE CHUNK OF  
ITS POPULATION  
SINCE THE 1970S  
— LEAVING THE  
CITY FILLED  
WITH ABANDONED  
BUILDINGS.



IN THE 1990S IT STILL  
HAD MORE THAN  
1 MILLION PEOPLE. BUT  
IN 2016, IT NOW HAS  
FEWER THAN 700  
THOUSAND.

A FAILED METROPOLIS,  
WHERE UNDERSTAFFED  
FIREFIGHTERS  
STRUGGLE TO DOUSE  
AROUND 9,000  
BUILDING FIRES EACH  
YEAR.

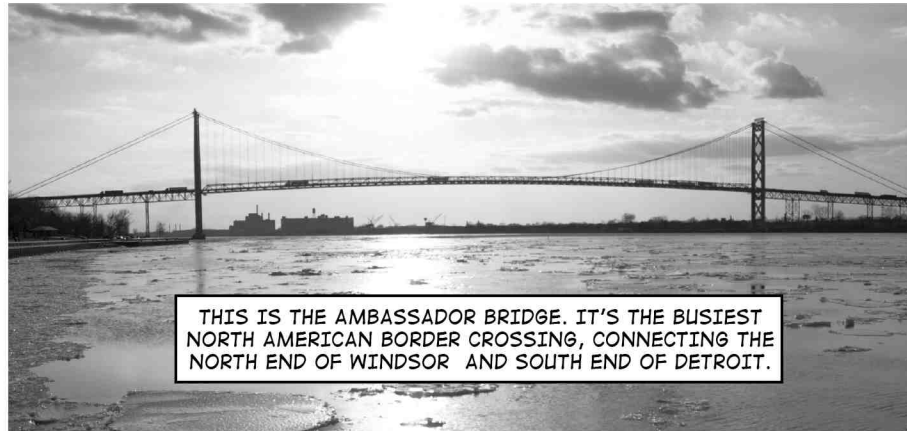


IT'S THE  
FALLOUT AS THE  
HEART OF  
AMERICA'S AUTO  
INDUSTRY  
CRUMBLES.

"THE PEACEFUL DETROIT RIVER. A GREAT CENTRE FIELDER  
MIGHT JUST BE ABLE TO THROW A BASEBALL ACROSS,  
WINDSOR AND DETROIT ARE THAT CLOSE," WRITES A LOCAL  
HISTORIAN, MARTY GERVAIS, IN *THE RUMRUNNERS*.



THIS IS THE NORTHERN  
VIEW FROM WINDSOR,  
ACROSS THE WATER.





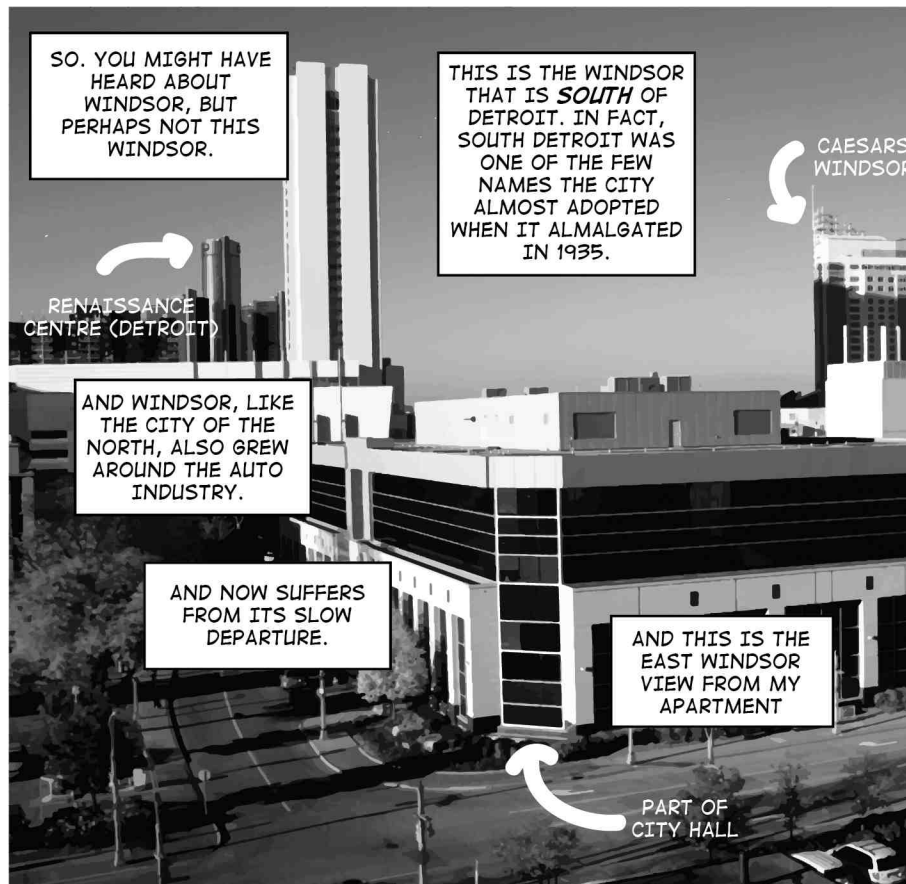
THERE'S THE FAMOUS WINDSOR NEAR LONDON ENGLAND AND THREE OTHERS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM.

THE US HAS MORE THAN 20, SOME STATES HAVING MORE THAN ONE.

WINDSOR CLEARLY ISN'T AN ORIGINAL CITY NAME.



NEW ZEALAND ALSO HAS ONE AND WIKIPEDIA SAYS AUSTRALIA HAS FOUR.



SO. YOU MIGHT HAVE HEARD ABOUT WINDSOR, BUT PERHAPS NOT THIS WINDSOR.

THIS IS THE WINDSOR THAT IS *SOUTH* OF DETROIT. IN FACT, SOUTH DETROIT WAS ONE OF THE FEW NAMES THE CITY ALMOST ADOPTED WHEN IT ALMALGATED IN 1935.

AND WINDSOR, LIKE THE CITY OF THE NORTH, ALSO GREW AROUND THE AUTO INDUSTRY.

AND NOW SUFFERS FROM ITS SLOW DEPARTURE.

AND THIS IS THE EAST WINDSOR VIEW FROM MY APARTMENT

AND THIS IS WINDSOR,  
VIEWED FROM DETROIT.



LET'S STEP BACK.  
YOU'VE PROBABLY ALSO  
HEARD OF WINDSOR.

THOUGH, PERHAPS  
FOR DIFFERENT  
REASONS.

THERE ARE THREE IN CANADA: ONE IN  
QUEBEC, ANOTHER IN NOVA SCOTIA  
AND THIS ONE, THE SOUTHERNMOST  
CITY IN ALL OF CANADA.



I CALL THIS PLACE "THE  
TROPICS OF CANADA."  
SADLY, PALM TREES  
DON'T ACTUALLY GROW  
HERE

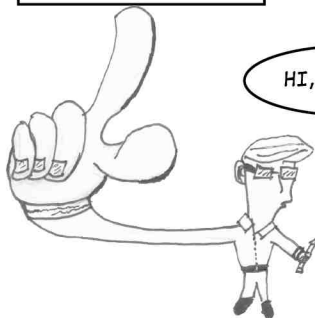


BUT YOU CAN EXPECT  
A HUMIDEX OF MORE  
THAN 40 C DURING  
JULY.

BUT ENOUGH ABOUT WINDSOR FOR A MINUTE.

I SHOULD INTRODUCE MYSELF.

HI, I'M JAY.



THIS IS A DRAWING OF ME. A REPRESENTATION, SCULPTED BY MY HAND AND MIND. IT'S NOT ACTUALLY ME, JUST WHAT I'D LIKE TO REVEAL ABOUT MYSELF.



AND THIS, A PHOTOGRAPH OF ME. ONE THAT WAS FRAMED BY MY FRIEND ANDREW. IT'S ALSO CREATED BY SOMEONE'S HANDS AND THOUGHTS. I ALSO CHOSE TO PLACE IT HERE.

I'M THE ONE WRITING THIS STORY.



AND I WANT YOU TO REMEMBER ALL THIS AS YOU READ ALONG.

A LITTLE ABOUT MYSELF: I'M NOT FROM WINDSOR.



I'M NOT EVEN FROM A CITY.



WHICH IS ABOUT 30 MINUTES DRIVING NORTHWEST FROM OSHAWA. IF YOU'RE NOT SURE WHERE THAT IS, TORONTO IS ABOUT 30 MINUTES FURTHER SOUTHEAST.

IT'S TECHNICALLY PART OF THE GREATER TORONTO AREA, BUT I COULDN'T FEEL FARTHER FROM CIVILIZATION.

WHEN I WAS 19 I LEFT  
MY TOWN FOR THE  
UNIVERSITY OF  
WINDSOR.



IT'S ABOUT A FIVE TO  
SIX HOUR DRIVE.

WITHIN TWO YEARS I  
SCRAPPED MY CAR.



NOW I RIDE A BICYCLE  
EVERYWHERE,  
REGARDLESS OF  
SEASON.

I GRADUATED WITH AN  
UNDERGRADUATE  
DEGREE IN CREATIVE  
WRITING AND DIGITAL  
JOURNALISM IN 2014.  
I WASN'T SURE WHAT  
TO DO NEXT WITH MY  
LIFE, SO I STUCK  
AROUND WINDSOR  
AND CONTINUED MY  
ART AS A BOOK  
DESIGNER BY  
STARTING MY OWN  
BUSINESS.

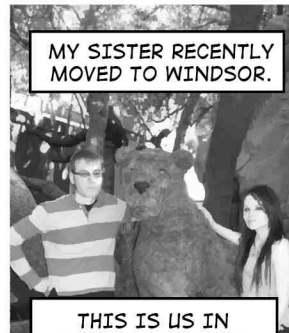
THAT SAME YEAR I  
WORKED AS A  
REPORTER FOR THE  
WINDSOR STAR.



AND STARTED CHASING  
MY MASTERS DEGREE  
IN CREATIVE WRITING  
WHICH WAS ALSO AT  
THE UNIVERSITY.

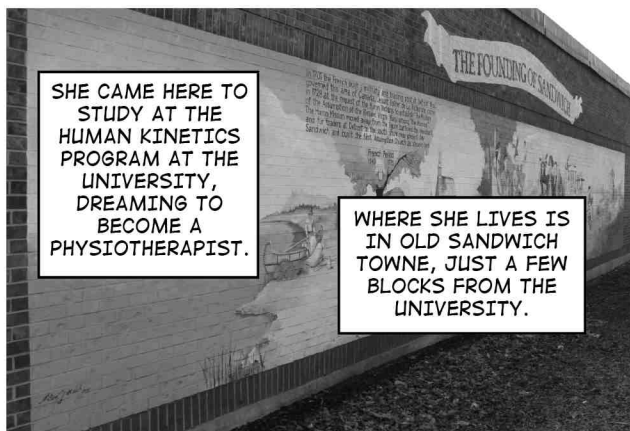
BORDERING THE  
UNIVERSITY IS THE  
NEIGHBOURHOOD  
KNOWN AS OLD  
SANDWICH TOWNE,  
WHICH IS THE OLDEST  
CANADIAN  
SETTLEMENT WEST OF  
MONTREAL. THOUGH  
I'VE NEVER LIVED  
THERE, IT HAS BEEN  
AN IMPORTANT PART  
OF MY UNIVERSITY  
EXPERIENCE AS IT HAS  
BEEN FOR SEVERAL  
OTHER STUDENTS IN  
THE WINDSOR AREA.

MY SISTER RECENTLY  
MOVED TO WINDSOR.



THIS IS US IN  
HIGH SCHOOL. THE  
PICTURE EMBARRASSES  
HER MORE THAN ME.

SHE CAME HERE TO  
STUDY AT THE  
HUMAN KINETICS  
PROGRAM AT THE  
UNIVERSITY,  
DREAMING TO  
BECOME A  
PHYSIOTHERAPIST.



WHERE SHE LIVES IS  
IN OLD SANDWICH  
TOWNE, JUST A FEW  
BLOCKS FROM THE  
UNIVERSITY.

AND SANDWICH,  
AN INTEGRAL  
PIECE OF  
WINDSOR, IS  
WHAT THIS  
STORY IS  
ABOUT.





THE PROBLEM WITH SANDWICH IS THAT A LARGE SECTION OF IT IS BOARDED UP. THIS IS GRAFFITI GANDHI. HE SITS AT AND ABANDONED GARAGE THAT'S ON PETER STREET, ON THE FOREFRONT OF WHERE THE INDIAN ROAD BLIGHT STARTS. JUST LIKE THE STREET, HE IS CRUMBLING.

GANDHI LOOKS ACROSS THE STREET, AND THE FIRST TWO THINGS HE SEES ARE THE BRIDGE AND ONE OF ITS MANY VICTIMS, SLOWLY CAVING IN.



AND HE SEES ALL.

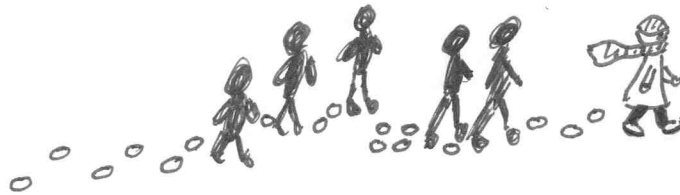


THIS IS THE BABY MILL, SITTING  
IN FRONT OF THE NAVAL RESERVE  
BASE ON SANDWICH'S  
RIVERFRONT

*all  
we are  
is all  
we were*

BUT WHAT ARE WE WHEN  
THE PAST IS SHUTTERED  
AND LEFT TO ROT?

THE TALE OF THIS JOURNEY STARTS ONE COLD JANUARY EVENING, WHEN I DECIDE TO TAKE SEVERAL FRIENDS ON A TOUR THROUGH PART OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD.



I  
**ALL WE ARE IS ALL WE WERE**

It's a crisp, -1 C night, warmer than the weather's been the past week, but still cold enough to make the tour group shiver. The calendar reads the middle of January, 2016, the perfect time to kick off a new year by showing my colleagues in the university's graduate English program the roots of their neighbouring community, Sandwich. The trip starts with me, Hannah, Chris, Justin, Irene, and James, whom I met when I first started this project in the fall last year.

I lead them past Dillon Hall, an old building that's one year short of its 160th birthday. It used to have vines grasping up its sides, but renovations a few years back, an attempt to modernize it, have left its brick exterior and large windows exposed. We also pass Assumption Church, which has a parish dating back to the early 1700s, before Sandwich was founded. The current building was built in 1845. Sadly, no one attends mass under its giant green copper spires, as it was closed just last year after it was pegged at needing \$15 million to renovate the historic, crumbling structure. Several offers of donations have been made to save the church, but the London Diocese has declined these. The parish sits on the edge of Sandwich, a neighbourhood it predates. The parish originated in 1747 when the First Jesuit Mission settled on the southern shore of the Detroit River.

We cross Huron Church Road and we're off the university grounds and now in the dark underbelly of the Ambassador Bridge on Peter Street. As we walk beneath its arch, I

say, “Last year, for a while, this area was actually closed off because the bridge was falling apart.”

It was during October that the bridge started to visibly crumble. Rubble lay scattered on the road. And you could look straight up and see the sky through cracks in the bridge. The road crossing under the bridge is also one of the few streets that grant people from the university access to Sandwich Towne.

Now it is supposedly safe to walk under the bridge. On the other side of it is a large university parking lot, asphalt cracked. A white, rusted, barbed wire fence separates the lot from adjacent housing. We continue walking on Peter. It’s here that everything goes dark. Streetlights cease to exist and eyes strain to adjust.

To the right and left of us, untouched snow spreads across lawns, rests against the cracked foundations of buildings that have had boards nailed over their doorways and windows for more than a decade. The building directly to the right has vines seemingly weaving in and out of its foundation and ripping at its siding. An orange mesh surrounds its front patio, warding off anyone from stepping under its roof. A ceiling hangs over the porch, pieces of metal torn and protruding towards the ground. The shingles on top of the porch roof are decayed and curve towards a huge hole in its centre. A giant, five-storey tree looms over the building, its thick branches leaning towards the house and resting against its third-storey roof.

Directly across the street, to our left, is a large, two-door garage. The left door is blocked off with a sheet of wood, which darkens and becomes black as it rots towards the ground. The left door has been painted over, scribbles of illegible graffiti surrounding its

edges. A large, white Gandhi sits on the door, looking at the abandoned buildings in contempt. But like the buildings, even this Gandhi graffiti is cracking and fading, having been sitting too long with no one to care for it. This is the epitome of what has happened to this historic community, a past that is slowly eroding.

I stop at the corner of Peter and Indian. Raise my cold hand and level it across the street, pointing at each building. “You notice how that building and that building and that building are all closed off? Does anyone know why?”

“A guy bought them up when he was trying to build the new bridge,” Hannah says.

“Yeah, it’s Matty Moroun. More than twenty years ago he started buying up all the buildings around here. He owns over a hundred buildings in this strip.”

“Over a hundred?!” Hannah asks.

The area of boarded up buildings owned by Moroun stretches beyond the three blocks of Indian Road and includes several apartment buildings, as well as a high school. We walk through one of the ends of this blighted area as we head north towards the river on Indian Road. The road stretches alongside the Ambassador Bridge, which arches over the Detroit River to connect two cities that grew around the automotive industry: Windsor and Detroit. All the buildings on the east side of the street are abandoned, boarded up and closed off from any potential of being used as homes, as they have been for more than a decade. They’re all owned by Moroun, who has been scooping up properties here for years in his bid to build a second, privately owned border crossing.

We continue walking down the street, which is devoid of streetlights. The shambles of forgotten buildings are cast in an eerie, winter night glow. This is accompanied by the soundtrack of transport trucks roaring over the bridge and boots crunching snow against a poorly ploughed sidewalk.

I'm a little sarcastic about it. "What do you guys think about this lovely area by the way?"

Justin pipes in, "It's very decrepit."

"Just because it's boarded up doesn't mean no one's living there," Irene says.

James makes a point. "Technically, I wouldn't mind living here just because the no streetlights mean that if you don't live in an upper floor, you don't have light shining in on you."

The west side of the street isn't completely abandoned. Some of the houses are still inhabited, rented out to students and the occasional family as Indian is the closest residential street in Sandwich to the university.

We keep chatting and walking. "Whooooa," yells James as his arms swing back, almost slipping on ice that stretches along the sidewalk.

Snow removal from pedestrian pathways is not the city's responsibility; in fact, it's up to the homeowner in Windsor. This means the terribly unsafe state of the sidewalk is the responsibility of Moroun and his company.

We make it through the block, injury free, and turn left onto University Avenue. As we walk west, this street connects with Riverside Drive and turns into Sandwich Street, which takes us all the way into the heart of the community.

After a few minutes of walking we find ourselves at the start of the business end of Sandwich, also known as Old Sandwich Towne. Here, the streetlights stop being the grey, metal arms sticking up over the ground and become black poles with lamps sitting slightly above my head. Our first stop is the Dominion House where Jeremy, another fellow student, is waiting for us. It's an old building with the front made of a foundation of orange, brown and white bricks. Its black roof has three chimneys. The Dominion House, or DH as it is known, is the oldest running tavern in the border region. The place predates the founding of Canada since it originally operated as a hotel back in 1859. However, the DH didn't have its current name. It wasn't until about a decade after the Dominion of Canada was officially a country that the tavern was named the Dominion House in 1878.

On 1883, February 23, the original DH building burned to the ground. The following month, it reopened across the street, where it sits today. Over the years, the tavern has had more than a dozen owners and operators. In the early 1900s, the owners grew crops around the building and raised hogs to sell to tavern customers. In the later part of the century, the basement started being used for cultural events like poetry readings and concerts, which persisted even into the 2000s. In 2004 the place closed a bit for renovations. And in 2011, it was taken over by Chris Mickle and Kristian Neice.

We walk past the bar and through the main room where a huge group of people are sitting around a long, rectangular table. Each one of them has a canvas propped up in front of them, fingers clutching a brush and scratching the bristles with a plethora of colours to each craft a landscape. It's paint night, apparently.



We sit down in the next room over. It's dark and brown, smells of lingering beer, and is complete with wood panels on all sides of the room. In one corner sit two arcade machines. Beside them is the sliding glass door to the patio. We sit in the opposite corner, where an old bench is attached to the wall.

“Just a quick tidbit about the history of Sandwich,” I say after we've ordered drinks and food. “Cheers.”

Glasses clink. I then tell them a quick rundown of Sandwich's history. The neighbourhood is the oldest Canadian settlement this side of Montreal, dating back to the Jesuit Mission that travelled down in 1747 and started Assumption Church. The settlement was officially founded in 1797. This was partially in response to the American Revolution when British North America lost Detroit, which was their base of operations in the area, in the Treaty of Paris in 1783. The war, which began in 1765, also brought a flood of loyalists to the southern side of the Detroit River, as the treaty divided the north side of the river as being part of the United States and the southern side being under British rule.

The settlement started with Peter Russell buying a 1,078 acre parcel of land from the Huron Church Reserve in this area. The deal wasn't solidified until three years later when the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Captain Thomas McKay, signed a treaty with the Ottawa, Chippewa, Powtawatamie and Wyandotte Nations, and officially made this part of Upper Canada.

I'm munching on a pickled egg when Justin, who's sitting right beside me, speaks up. "You know where Hurricanes is, that lot? It used to be a brickyard, which my dad's side, the Robinet side, owned. And then they had the winery right across the street."

Justin and I chat a bit about his family history while everyone else carries on with their own conversations. I gulp down my egg and then ask both him and Hannah about living in Sandwich as they both currently reside here.

"I'm quite close to the bridge, so I haven't had a whole lot of experiences," Hannah says, who's lived in Sandwich for two years. "But I went to the grocery store in Sandwich, which was really grouchy."

"But you're able to walk there?"

"I was able to walk there. Actually my dad, we drove through this area at Christmas and he was like, 'this is a good area now.' Because apparently back in the day it used to be really bad. But it's been cleaned up a lot and it looks really nice."

"There's a farmer's market, too," Hannah continues. "It's pretty cool in the summer."

Justin tells his Sandwich story. "I've been here two separate times, collectively a year. I've been moving all around the city for the last five years. Right now I'm living in one of my dad's houses," he says, explaining how he and his dad renovated it years ago. "We've had it for around a decade and it's one that we haven't actually been able to sell."

Justin moved back into the house last summer, from where he is working on his graduate English degree at the University of Windsor. Several years ago, he did the first

year of his undergraduate at the University of Ottawa, but came back to Windsor for his remaining years. “I loved that I’m a 20 minute walk from school,” he says, “and it is really convenient because bus rides are right across from my house and I’m between two corner stores and a barber shop, so there’s a lot that I can get around to. It’s nice to not need a car, but I’m getting to the point that in the next couple years I’m not going to be able to walk everywhere.”

“But do you find that it’s mostly a walkable community here?” I ask. “You have pretty much most of the things you need within walking distance?”

“Yeah, I get out a lot more.”

Hannah smiles. “I like trying to convince people to come out this way when we hang out for drinks and stuff because I really hate downtown. It’s really nice to have an alternative and say, ‘Hey, there’s Rock Bottom and it’s like really awesome and we have the DH.’”

“That’s a really good point because I lived here for almost 20 years,” Irene says. “I left right after my 19th birthday, so I never did the downtown scene and I didn’t really care for it.”

“It’s the worst,” says Chris.

Irene continues. “And now being down at the university this way, this is the first time I’ve had to socialize and go out here in Windsor with adults and we’ve always done it in Sandwich and it’s been so nice. It’s a little bit rustic, it’s quiet. It’s a better feel. It’s a much nicer environment to have a conversation or a dinner party or any one of those things.”

“It seems like a much nicer place to go when you just want to hang out,” says Chris. “As opposed to downtown. That’s where you go when you’re 19 and you want to look at someone the wrong way and get stabbed.”

Though downtown is also somewhat walkable, having a hospital, grocer and bank within a few block radius, it doesn’t feel like a community. It caters to people who drink a lot, as the businesses in the area are built mainly around a plethora of clubs and pubs, bringing in young folk and people from across the border. A walk on even a cold weekend night means bumping into droves of drunk people, lines stretching down the street and usually witnessing a fight. Or more.

Sandwich doesn’t have anywhere near as many essential facilities within it as downtown does. It doesn’t have a hospital, but it does have a clinic. But it still feels like more of a community. And though it is technically part of a city, and within a 30 to 45 minute walking distance of the city’s downtown, it feels like its own, separate town.

I take our group east down Sandwich Street, away from the core of the neighbourhood. There’s not too much on this block. To our backs, beside the Dominion House, is Courtesy Bicycles, an independent bike shop that has been around since 1985. On the side of the bike shop facing the tavern is a giant, colourful mural, featuring the earth with several bicycles rotating around its circumference. Last year , I stopped by this place to pick up two new pedals to fix up an old bike of mine and also helped my sister find a new lock for her own bicycle. Sandwich, and even the majority of Windsor’s core, I find is the most bike friendly area in Ontario. The city has the province’s mildest winters and is completely flat, save potholes and a few bridges over train tracks. Windsor

has a scenic bike path stretching all the way up the riverfront with a view of the towers of Detroit while a bike trails weaves past grass, gardens and trees. Several streets running across the city also have bike lanes, which work up until the odd few days Windsor has snow on the ground.

We walk past the Bake Shoppe, which sits in an old, French-Canadian style house that was built somewhere between 1806 and 1809. It has two chimneys on either side of the building. We take a trail that snakes north between the shoppe and Detroit Street. It's been ploughed, but our feet still scrunch snow. We turn west down Russell Street, one of two streets named after the founder of the town. Russell runs right beside the river and I can see the bridge fill the sky while the water sparkles in its light. A chill also inches through my coat. The riverfront here has few buildings to block gusts of wind carrying the winter chill. My mitts are off as I juggle my notebook and a pen, taking notes. I'm also holding a cellphone flashlight so I can see, and a voice recorder so I can remember later what I'm saying. But I can't feel any of these items because my fingers have lost all circulation and are numb. I race in front of the others, speedwalking in hopes of carrying myself and the group out of the cold sooner.

We stop in front of Baby Mill, a historic landmark that has been preserved, despite it not having a function anymore. It's a cylinder with a stone base and wooden circumference, reaching several stories up towards the sky, peaking with a cone. On its front is a windmill. Also on its front is an addition that wasn't present when it was used as a mill: a white neon sign, "All we are is all we were."

All we are is all we were. It seems ironic that this slogan is raised over a community whose past is simultaneously being erased by a single man. We had just strolled through the beginning of Sandwich when we made our way to the DH. The entrance to the neighbourhood is now essentially a ghost town. The emptiness that began this trip is what settles on me as a cold wind whips my coat.

Behind the mill is another important building. It was built this decade, but there's still deep history behind it, stretching beyond its foundation. It's Her Majesty's Command Ship Hunter.

I tell the group that it's the new base for Windsor's naval reserve core here. While I worked at the Windsor Star, I attended and wrote about their moving ceremony, which coincided with the anniversary of the Battle of the Atlantic last May. Building the facility was a \$36.4 million project. It's meant to fit around 250 personnel. The building has several rooms such as a drill deck, offices, mess halls, which are pretty much bars, storage rooms, classrooms, a boat lift and a shed.

Previously the Hunter base was on Ouellette, in Windsor's downtown core. And they were landlocked there and it was difficult to get personnel into the water to run exercises. The old base opened up in 1941 and was used to train sailors during World War Two.

After I stop talking some people take pictures of the mill, glowing with its words of wisdom. Then we slip around the south side of Mill Street, moving to complete our walk around the block. "Right here is the Duff-Baby house," I say, pointing to a big, old white house on the right. The building was constructed between 1792 and 1798 and is

currently the oldest building in Windsor. When it was originally built it was used as a fur trading house by Alexander Duff, the first owner. In 1807 it was bought by James Baby, and now it's an office for the Ontario Heritage Trust.

We continue walking up the street. I point to the left, where the Windsor Port Authority building sits. They moved into the community just a few years ago. We keep walking. I rub my hands together to warm them. At the corner of Mill and Sandwich I point to the building on the right, which houses the Big Pita restaurant and a closed storefront right beside it. Above the shops are two stories of apartments.

"This is what I was talking about," Justin says.

"Yes, one of Justin's ancestors used to own this place," I say. "This is actually going to be revitalized very shortly too."

"What was it?" Irene asks.

"It was a winery," Justin and I blurt out.

Justin points across the street. "And right across in the lot was the brickyard."

The land was bought by Jules Robinet in 1884 and the structure was built sometime around 1885. At the time a lot of the surrounding land was filled with vineyards, which allowed Robinet to operate a prominent winery out of the building's cellar, which kickstarted the Essex area's wine industry. He continued to make wine until 1935. The family also owned a brickyard right across the street, which is now a strip mall. The yard was crucial to helping the Sandwich area build up. The current strip mall was built in the 1970s, and has a well-known bar called Hurricanes and a few other businesses, including the Sandwich medical clinic. The strip mall w has a very plain,

brick exterior and doesn't fit in with any any of the old, European feel that the rest of Sandwich evokes. Luckily, the owners are investing in this building, and updating it to fit in with the rest of town.

Here is where Irene parts ways for the night. I want to continue the tour, but it's getting cold and someone else is waiting up ahead to join us. We walk westbound down Sandwich and stop at Rock Bottom, where Samie, another friend, is waiting. We sit down for a few minutes to warm up. The building the restaurant occupies is more than 90 years old.

Despite the old established buildings and businesses in the community core, there are new businesses investing in the area. Just next door construction is underway for the Sandwich Brewing Co., which has essentially gutted the entire spot and is building the interior from scratch to start up a new craft beer business. A couple doors down is Black Bench Coffee Roasters, a small indie coffee roasting place that opened up shop in 2014.

Now that we're warmed up, I take the group back out to Sandwich Street. We continue west and pass Westside Foods. It's an independently owned grocery store. And it was recently bought by someone who lived in Toronto and is trying to revamp the place.

We pass a large apartment building and a retirement home. I lead the group to the other side of Sandwich at the corner of Brock Street. I point diagonally to a large school. "There is General Brock Public School. It's the only school left in the Sandwich area that hasn't been closed down. There's another school that was closed down, Forster Secondary School, and it was recently bought by the Bridge Company too."



General Brock also houses the neighbourhood's public library. I gesture towards Mill Street, which is behind us. "So what's actually happening is the old fire hall that way is being converted into a new library with plenty of space."

"And here is Mackenzie Hall," I say, as I turn to the building right beside us. The structure was built between 1855 and 1856 by Alexander Mackenzie, the second Prime Minister.

I snap my fingers. "And this used to be a courthouse and a jail."

"And right beside there is the old Windsor jail," I point to a neighbouring building with 20-foot-walls surrounding it.

The last two instances of capital punishment at the jail occurred when two people were hung in 1943. The jail closed in 2014. We make our way back eastward on Sandwich. We stop around Mill Street. At this intersection is the old post office, which closed in April 2013.

The post office is a historic location, built in 1905. It was closed after Canada Post decided to shut it down without consulting the community. Canada Post also stopped any sorting of mail that happens in Windsor, so if I were to send a letter from one part of the city to another, it would have to travel to London, Ontario before coming back to the city.

I poke my finger at the second and third floors of the building. "And Canada Post did nothing with the second and third storeys of the building for several years, so everything is just falling apart. Someone who had good business sense bought this in

2014. And next month, hopefully, the bottom floor here is opening up as a cafe. And they're hoping to turn the second and third floors into a bed and breakfast."

"That's awesome," says Hannah. "Go Sandwich!"

And right behind the post office is the strip mall that hosts Hurricanes. Here, we end our tour. A few people head home and others, myself included, walk into Hurricanes to sit down and away from the cold before setting off for home.

My feet pedal down Windsor's broken asphalt, hands wobbling as I pass over patches of ice and snow. "All we are is all we were" is still engraved in my mind. It's still throbbing in the back of my head as I crack open my apartment door and my cat meows, asking me for food. I sit down at my desk and flip through the pictures on my camera. I stop at a picture of the mill. It's grainy, blurry as my camera struggled with the low-lit night. What stands out is the neon, pointing to the importance of the past and how precious it is to the present. Behind the neon is the pixelated outline of the mill, a landmark, singling out the neighbourhood from the riverbed. Here is part of the community's historic past. Behind the mill is HMCS Hunter, a piece of Windsor's Second World War history brought to the shore of the city's beginnings, connecting two historic moments. But, a few blocks to the east is a section of the neighbourhood, some of which has been there since before the Second World War, being left to rot. Here, in Canada's oldest settlement west of Montreal, sit more than 110 buildings, unused for more than a decade, crumbling at the roof and foundation, infested with rats and who knows what else. The bridge rises over Sandwich and cuts it off from Windsor, but now there's also 1.5 kilometres of rotting

buildings to ward people away from entering the neighbourhood. If all we are is all we were, then the past makes us part of who we are in the present. So what does it mean for a community when someone wants to bulldoze a large section of its housing, a physical embodiment of its past?

## **II A WALK FROM THE RIVER**

Sweat slips between my toes. Feet patter south down the Indian Road sidewalk.

It's 2015. Muggy, yet only 26 C in the September Windsor sun. Sweat lines my socks, shirt, underwear. This is something you should know about Windsor: until everything freezes, it's almost always muggy. Even then the weather still finds a way to lick moisture in between the seams of my clothing.

I'm here because Indian Road is the start of Sandwich. Directly north of the road is Riverside Drive, which parallels the Detroit River. Beside it to the east is the Ambassador Bridge, which casts its long shadow on the street as the sun beckons each new day. Beside the steel giant is where the University of Windsor begins: the place where I currently teach composition and study to finish my masters degree in creative writing.

Even though this street is a minute walk from the university, one of the city's three biggest employers and home to 16,000 students, it's mostly filled with with vacant, degraded homes. It's the largest hub of urban blight within Southwestern Ontario.

I make my way down the street, which starts at University Avenue, one block south of Riverside Drive. Dark pools of sweat spread from the armpits of my green, plaid shirt. The first victim of blight, a three-storey apartment, sits on the east side of the street towering over the corner of University and Indian. Its windows and doors are boarded up. On the same side of the street, directly beside the bridge and next to the apartment, is another home. The roof drapes over the front porch, supported by stone pillars and ivy

wrapping around its exterior. Again, this is boarded up and forgotten. The shingles are starting to peel.

As I continue down the block, I realize that all the houses on the east side of the street, closest to the bridge, are boarded up. Victims on this block of Indian Road number about a dozen. This is only the east side, on one street, of a single city block. On the west side, however, there are some homes that aren't abandoned. Here, I see a man leave a house and pace down the sidewalk. He looks around my age—I guess he's a student of some sort, rushing to get to class. Still, there is one abandoned building on the west side of Indian Road between University Avenue and Peter Street, making the total amount of wasted property 11 houses and one apartment building.

Each of the boarded up homes has a sign, usually slapped on the door:

PRIVATE PROPERTY

NO TRESPASSING

THESE PREMISES ARE MONITORED

CALL (519)-977-0700

ALL OFFENCES WILL BE PROSECUTED TO

THE FULL EXTENT OF THE LAW

The street continues for another three blocks, making the total stretch of the road just under a kilometre. As I walk down the street, it's the same story: everything is boarded up next to the bridge and there's the odd forgotten property on the west side of Indian. This changes slightly at the corner of Donnelly Street. Again, same scenario on

the east side with buildings sitting empty, unused. Here, the quality of housing rises on the west side, most of them with the black gleam of solar panels.

The first house is a four storey triplex, built for students, with each of the three units having a basement garage, which I count as a storey because there is a bedroom in each. The giant building and three others sit on the smallest section of Indian Road, between Peter Street and Wyandotte Avenue. This is an area where someone has rebuilt and retrofitted homes for the purpose of catering to students who want to live next to the University of Windsor.

The reason I know all this is because I used to work for my previous landlord one summer, cleaning out his properties when students moved out and also cutting their grass, which is a strenuous activity in Windsor's humid July weather. The solar panel houses are his. I even helped with the moving and lifting of the heavy panels up scaffolding while they were being installed on top of some houses. While I tended to the lawns on this corner of Indian and Donnelly, I would see groups of workers tending to the lawns of the abandoned lots. One man would run an industrial lawn mower from house to house, while others would catch the bits it couldn't cut with weed whackers.

Nowadays, it would appear that no one takes care of what is legally required for the abandoned properties. The sidewalks are a hazard to walk on in the winter. The grass somehow looks both overgrown and dead through the summer. When the snow melts after the winter, it's apparent that no one bothered to rake leaves in the fall. Technically, the houses are all supposed to be taken care of too, because the city has pegged them as historic, which means they all have to be kept up to a certain standard.

When I hit Wyandotte, my feet ache. I've only walked 600 metres, but the empty street feels much longer than it actually is. To boot, not a single vehicle has passed me down the street. The only sounds roar from the bridge, less than 100 metres away. The rumble of trucks passing over the asphalt grows as I make my way south and the bridge lowers to street level. Diesel exhaust chokes me.

At Wyandotte, the blight takes over. Again, the entirety of the eastern side of the street is boarded up, houses cracking at their foundation in this longest stretch of the street. Here, there seems to be an attempt to separate the forgotten buildings from people—or people from the buildings. A green chainlink fence wards off the homes, stretching down the block. Even on the west side, most houses are boarded up with signs warning people from tramping on their grounds.

I stop when I hit a small pocket of six homes, resisting the spreading decay. One of the houses bears the orange sign of Brian Masse, the NDP candidate for Windsor-West in the current federal election. Masse's held his position as MP since 2002—Windsor is a union town, after all.

The house neighbouring the Masse supporter also has a sign on its front lawn, advertising a new price for selling the property. And then there's a dwelling that I can't tell whether is part of the blight or not. It doesn't have any sign on the front, yet the lawn is in disarray: overgrown with weeds stretching in every direction—obviously it hasn't been cut in a couple weeks. There's a Windsor bylaw about keeping grass at a certain height and this is certainly well over the limit. But what points me to the house's decline

is that the eavestrough is broken, hanging off the front side of the roof, and a tree sprouts out of its trench, already a couple feet tall.

This is Indian Road, a two-minute walk from the University of Windsor. And most of it is abandoned. Indian Road ends at Mill Street, but the plight of the housing situation continues. Just around the corner from the end of the street is a six-storey apartment building, its beige bricks sporting a facade of unused windows and boarded openings. The next street over, Rosedale has several boarded up buildings as it nears Mill. A walk down Mill for several streets reveals more buildings, empty, destroyed. One house has a metal roof over its porch, the metal ceiling of which has a sharp slope, as if someone dropped a giant boulder on it.

Mill intersects with Felix Avenue, where the only lively thing in the area seems to be Pizza Plus, bright and colourful and thriving at the corner. Every time I walk into this pizza shop, there's always a customer or two ordering or waiting for something to come fresh out of the oven. This is odd, given that a large chunk of the possible customers within walking distance don't exist as the houses lie trapped behind wooden boards and nails.

A walk down Felix Avenue reveals more vacant buildings, including an old, historic high school, boards over its large entrance. A few houses across from it are falling apart and shuttered. A walk down Edison, which intersects with Felix and travels alongside the secondary school, reveals a street with one entire side abandoned, much like Indian Road. Only on this street, everything is more run down, green mould stretching up the brick siding and scorch marks licking their roofs.



Here is a spot in a historic community with more than 1.5 kms of street riddled with abandoned buildings. Beyond the historic factor, this is prime property, decaying right beside the University of Windsor. This strip of houses should be one of the city's busiest areas. Yet, it's abandoned, a ghost town. I walk down the stretch some days and hardly see a car or a person walking. People whisper rumours of "the other side of the bridge" and worry about that other side, the blighted part of Windsor. Some people see the bridge as a dividing line for where Windsor ends. Most people I speak to look at the rundown, boarded buildings in Sandwich and think it's because of the city's depression, as Windsor has routinely been the country's unemployment capital. It's a safe assumption, but it couldn't be farther from the truth. The emptiness of the area's buildings has nothing to do with the city's economic status or its slowly declining population. All this is because of the greedy ambitions of a single man.

### III A ROAD TO NOWHERE

There are more than 110 boarded up properties in what's known as the Indian Road Area. And they're all owned by one man: Matty Moroun. I suppose one could consider him the antagonist of this story, but I'll let you be the judge of that.

Moroun is the current owner of the Ambassador Bridge, having obtained it in 1979 by buying up the majority of the bridge's stocks—about \$30 million worth—when it hit the New York Stock Exchange. The bridge is retained through his two companies, the Detroit International Bridge Company and the Canadian Transit Company. His main company is called CenTra, a holding company.

Forbes currently pegs the net worth of the 88-year-old Moroun and his family just under \$2 billion. His prized property is the bridge, estimated to be worth somewhere between \$1.5 billion and \$3 billion. CenTra, Inc. doesn't just own the bridge, but also has Central Transport International under its belt, a small freight carrier. On top of that, Moroun also has the controlling share of Universal Truckload Services Inc., which is another holding company controlling several trucking lines and logistics companies. In other words, he controls the bridge and a lot of the stuff that goes over it. I generally refer to the enterprises under Moroun as the Bridge Company, as it's difficult sometimes to discern which business directly controls what. This all boils down to: Moroun owns everything. This also includes the duty free shops on both sides of the border. The charge is \$6.25 CAN or \$5 US for passenger vehicles travelling on the bridge. From time to

time, these charges go up. And by the time you are reading this, that will probably be the case.

Moroun's ambition to build and own a second bridge has devastated the Indian Road Area. On May 21, 1996 when he started purchasing buildings on the street, there was no visible decay as each house had been maintained by its owners. The properties continued to be used and kept up to order when owned by the Bridge Company, as they rented the buildings out to tenants until the mid 2000s. After becoming unoccupied, they fell into disarray. A *Windsor Star* article by Claire Brownell says that between the mid 1990s and now, Moroun has made more than 180 property purchasing transactions, spending \$52 million on property in Windsor. About \$32 million of that was spent on lots in the Sandwich area, totalling more than his initial bridge investment.

The current bridge is showing signs of wear after more than 80 years arching over the Detroit River. Several years ago, back when I was a young, second-year undergraduate student, I was taking pictures of Canada Geese from underneath the bridge at the riverfront. A Paladin Security guard approached me, told me to stop, blabbing something about how I can't take pictures of the bridge because "Mr. Harper" would be unhappy because of some international security reason, but also that I shouldn't be under it because it runs the risk of debris falling off it. And as you'll see, he made a good prediction.

Paladin Security used to patrol up and down Indian Road, day and night. Their logo was plastered on the boarded up homes, a warning to any malcontents. They also kept a watchful eye on areas like under the bridge, as I experienced. Now, however,

they're gone from the Bridge Company's doings. And their logo is no longer emblazoned on more than 100 homes. Their watch no longer follows me when I walk near the bridge, but it also doesn't keep Indian Road safe. And I haven't seen anyone else patrolling the area in their stead. Though in a post-Snowden era, having security dredging up and down a road can be unnerving, it actually provided a sense of security to many residents who still lived in the nearly bare street.

It's been about a fortnight since I last trekked down Indian, sweating under Windsor's overbearing sun. Now my hands shake from the barely more than 10 C cold, even though I'm wearing a t-shirt, sweater and jacket—this is Windsor in the fall, when the hungry weather can't decide whether it wants to boil me or freeze me for later. The only thing its appetite can decide on is that it wants its moisture to seep into my bones, possibly preparing me for some sort of Motor City stew.

Hands turn purple, numb. Yet pain still radiates from the finger tips to the knuckles. I have chilblains, a condition that causes extreme pain in my fingers and toes when exposed to cold because my circulation cuts off—it's even worse when moisture is added to the equation. And if I heat them up too quickly, my blood vessels can pop. A doctor once told me that I should probably try living in a different country. I settled by moving to Windsor. It's warmer here in the tropics of Canada.

Despite the weather, this is the perfect time to explore the Indian Road Area, given recent news about its struggles. In June, Windsor's city council took to challenging the owner of the bridge in Canada's Supreme Court.

It's not the first time the city has challenged Moroun court side, but it's the most recent. As is mentioned in a late June 2015 *Windsor Star* article by Dave Battagello, a ruling by Superior Court Justice Richard Gates a couple years ago said the bridge company had to conform to city bylaws in the maintenance of its properties.

The bridge company responded, saying it was a federal entity and municipal bylaws have no bearing on it (even though it is a privately owned corporate entity). The Federal Court threw up its hands and said they could not deal with the issue, leaving the Supreme Court's ruling in place.

However, in April 2015, the issue came to the spotlight again when the Federal Court of Appeal overturned the Supreme Court ruling and said the bridge company was a federal entity and exempt from municipal laws. The city took the fight back to the Supreme Court.

The more recent news, however, is a ruling that was made in a U.S. federal court at the end of September. Moroun had made a claim that he had exclusive rights to the bridge and had tried suing the Canadian government and several American federal entities for trying to build a new, non privately-owned bridge to span Windsor-Detroit. The court dismissed the suit, and even though the bridge company will lose a lot of profit—an estimated 75 per cent of truck traffic and up to 39 per cent of car traffic—the company doesn't have exclusive rights to a crossing over the river.

I didn't even know about any of this the first time I set foot in the city. I remember when I first drove into Windsor with my mother back in 2010, the beginning of the city where the 401 turns into Huron Church was filled with empty housing. Abandoned,

boarded up homes with cement blocks closing off the driveways. At first, I thought this was a sign of economic decay, a warning to stay away from Windsor. What was actually happening was the government was buying up homes to later turn into a highway which would lead to the new bridge.

The past few years the Herb-Gray Highway has been under construction and now, as I'm writing this, a portion of it can even be driven on. The point of the highway is to eventually lead large volumes of traffic to the Gordie Howe International Bridge, expected to be completed in 2020. This Bridge is a \$2.1-billion project headed by the Canadian government and will lay the groundwork to make the busiest border crossing in North America even busier. It will also eventually put the majority of that traffic—and money from such—in the hands of government and not an individual. Initially, the money from tolls will pay off the building of the bridge. Moroun had opposed this new crossing and filed his lawsuit back in March 2010, essentially committing himself to building a bridge of his own, to keep his own monopoly.

The U.S. ruling that Moroun's lawsuit was invalid comes less than a week before I start speaking with Sandwich Towne residents. While he's not able to nab a few dollars from the government for attempting to usurp his monopoly, he still has this large section of urban blight on the chopping block. These historic properties are penned to be bulldozed in the event the Supreme Court of Canada gives him the thumbs up. But even if Moroun can't flatten his properties, they have been sitting for years of neglect and there is a good chance they'd have to be levelled and rebuilt before they can be habitable. If

“All we are is all we were,” then what does that mean when there is no chance of salvaging the past?

#### IV LIVING IN THE SHADOW

The first full week of October is when I start interviewing people on Indian Road. On Monday the weather's risen to a crisp room temperature—a whole 19 C—and for the first time in days, I can see the sun.

I begin where I started my last trek down the street the previous month. I'm not bothering to knock on any houses on the east side because they're all boarded up. And I'm not sure what I'd do if someone answered.

The first house on the street is on the west corner of University Ave and Indian Road. It has five doors and I can't figure out which one to knock on so I skip the house for now. The next house is boarded up. My fist hammers on the door of the following house. It budes in a tad. I wait a few seconds. No one answers. I don't know what to do. I can't just leave the house with a door unlatched and ready to burst open with a slight push. My knuckles rap the door again. Creaks. I can see inside the house. But I can't see anybody.

Do I leave? I wait a few more seconds. A woman comes to the door.

"Sorry, I knocked the door open a little bit," I say. "I'm writing a story about this whole neighbourhood. I was wondering if I could talk with your or somebody who lives here—"

"It's kind of a bad time," she says, snappy and rushed. She asks me to come back some other time, before lunch—an interview I know I'm not going to have time to chase down.



I walk back to University Ave. Two men are walking to and from a basement apartment of the five door home, dragging audio equipment into a grey car. I stop and ask the first guy, who's loading an amp and XLR cables into the vehicle. He doesn't live here, but he points to his friend. His face scrunches when I ask him. He's crunched for time, but he's nice enough to leave me a cell number.

I make my rounds back to the houses. "Hey, how's it going?" I say as a man opens the door to the first floor apartment of a house.

"Good, how about you?"

This is already going better than my other greeting attempts. "I'm writing a story about the neighbourhood and what it means for people who live here. And I was wondering if maybe you want to talk to me? Take up a couple minutes of your time and maybe your roommate's."

"Yeah, she's here too," said the man, referring to his roommate who popped into the conversation.

The exterior of the house is in the plain, boxy, brown brick configuration of most of the other buildings on the street. Because of this, it looks old and boring. The residents of the house walk me towards a table in the kitchen area and I see that the inside is much different.

"It's a lot nicer on the inside than it is on the outside," says the woman as we walk, who later introduces herself as Selina Garganis, a 21-year-old studying nursing at the college.

She's right about the interior and I feel guilty because they tell me that I don't have to take off my shoes. The floor is lined with glossy, new tiles that shine with the sun streaming through the windows. Everything has a light, neutral tone to it and the room is spacious.

They both sit down at the table and invite me to take a chair. We catch each other's names: the man is Jacob Collins. He's 19 and is also going to college, but for mechanical engineering, technology, automotive product design. Jacob and Selina met last year when they both lived in a Saint Clair College residence. For this year, they moved into Sandwich and drive each day to get to the school, which is located just outside the city limits.

They have been living here for a month. "We weren't originally supposed to be living here," says Selina. "We were supposed to be living over at Brock. And then the landlord said he's got a three bedroom house—because that was a six bedroom house and then this one was available—so then he moved us here. We agreed."

"So that's the gist of it, I guess," she continues. "But I was a little intimidated because everything's all boarded up."

"So what do think about that?" I jump in, tongue stumbling over itself.

I smile because I don't have to awkwardly slide in the topic of the blight.

"Because you don't have to walk through that to go to school, but you still live here and drive here. So what does that make you guys feel?"

"I don't mind," Jacob says, "I mean—"

“I think it’s intimidating,” Selina says. “It freaks me out. Like I worry about the winter if people are going to try to get in there or something—I don’t know.”

But there was an incident that occurred when they weren’t home. “We got home after going downtown and there were cops sitting in front of this house,” Selina says, pointing to the boarded up house right beside theirs.

Selina is talking fast and it’s hard to follow. “And then there was two more cops—we were freaked out a little bit ... One walked in between our two houses and the other ones were on the front step, got into the cruiser and drove away.”

After speaking with Selina and Jacob, I go to see if their neighbour is home. I knock on the door and a man steps out of the house. I introduce myself and learn that he, too, moved in for school this fall. This is Nick Sutcliffe, a 22-year-old tackling his fifth year of undergraduate drama at the university.

We chat for a bit about university and what he might do after graduation. He’s focusing on school and doesn’t want to think about what happens after he’s done his education.

“We were looking and this place was available. It’s close to the school.”

And then I get to the abandoned building question. What’s it like living in the area?

“Personally, the house is somewhat comfortable,” he says. “The windows need to be fixed up, but just for energy sake...” he continues.

“So living across from all this doesn’t really bug you?” I ask, pointing to the boarded up house across the street, trying to steer him to the question.

Nick's house is a boring configuration of brown bricks, just like Selina and Jacob's place, but is still maintained so it's livable. The house across the street, like all the houses on the east side, is cracked at the foundation and has greenery growing out of the eavestrough.

"Not overly for myself," Nick says. "I was somewhat informed by our landlord when we were first looking at the house that all this side was supposed to be demolished and turned into a kind of park—not like a jungle gym park, but a free range, trees and grass park."

I can't see Moroun allowing that to happen anytime soon. Nick is new here and unlike Selina and Jacob, he hasn't had any run-ins with suspicious activity stemming from the area surrounding the closed off buildings. On top of that, he's only here in passing, so I doubt he cares about the community quality of the street or how it looks.

We part ways. I search down the street for anyone else willing to talk. Several of the houses have cars sitting in their driveways. I try the doorbell on several, but I can't hear it ding—I'm unsure whether they work anymore. Some of the homes have lights on inside. I knock on the doors and no one answers.

I almost try hammering on the door of a house with a rent sign on the lawn. The door to the sun patio is locked with a giant, blue external lock. Nobody lives here.

Something seems to be going on in one house. A Dave Sundin sign sits on the lawn, advertising the Windsor-West Liberal candidate. I walk up to the porch. I can see and hear into the house through the screen door. Someone's talking. I knuckle the wood. Wait a few seconds.

A man opens the door and agrees to speak with me about the street. His name's Arshdeep Sidhu, a 28-year-old university graduate who's been renting his place on the street since 2010. He moved here from India after having studied engineering. And he completed his computer science master degree in 2014 at UWindsor.

He invites me to take a seat on his porch for the interview. He's done with school, but currently working. I'm wondering why he lives on the street.

"It's a quiet street. And I think that why I'm here is because it is close to the university. That's the most convenient part of the location," he says.

The other side of the street has been closed since he started living here, but Arshdeep says he hasn't worried about the abandoned buildings.

"They used to pass by every 15 minutes, cars. They used to in the daytime and the nighttime also," he says about Paladin Security, which used to look after the bridge company's properties. "We never had any problems out here."

Since then, the security company has disappeared. "They used to be our friends," he laughs.

Taking advantage of the quiet street—which Arshdeep says used to have a car pass only around every three minutes—and vacant parking lots, Arshdeep and his university friends used to play urban cricket. He says in the process, they got to speak with and become friends with some of the security guards. Arshdeep says that his friends have since moved on and left town. "You came at the right time," he laughs. "Maybe next month or maybe another two months I'll be gone too."

I continue my trek down the road, but all the houses don't seem to have anyone home. I get to the last house in the block and knock. I wait a minute and figure no one's home. I walk away and as my feet touch the sidewalk, the door opens and a man hollers. He doesn't say much when I talk with him, calls the place, "Quiet."

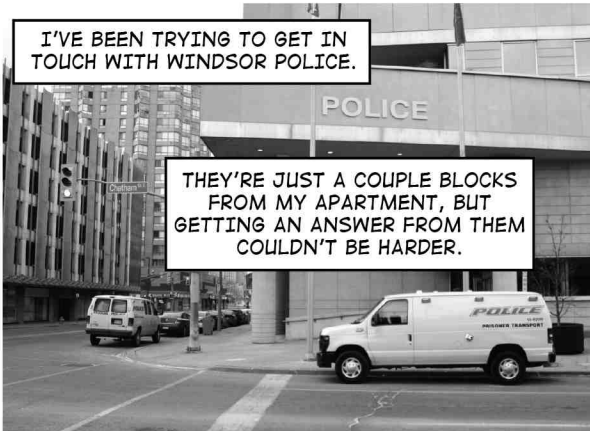
I head back to the university, having finished with interviewing some residents living within a single block that sits in the shadow of the bridge. It could be the time of day I chose to venture down the road, but in this section of Indian Road, it seems to mainly be university students, renting a spot to get them through the short stay of their studies. And many of them have no clue what's causing the disaster across the street from them.

Is it because the city isn't talking about this? Is there a lack of community outreach? The local paper certainly is on top of talking about the woes of the Bridge Company and its stretch of blight, but outside of the odd quote in a paper, I've never really seen the city taking an initiative to inform people of what's going on. Most people I speak with, my mom included, think the area is abandoned because the city has hit the slumps, not just that somebody purchased several blocks of land.

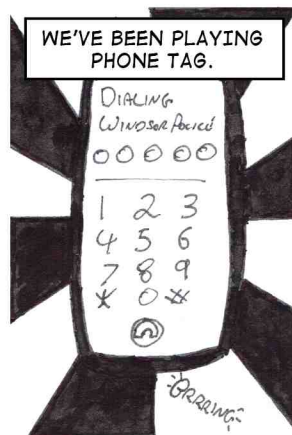
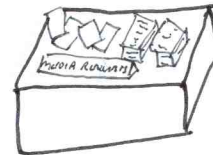
The area leading into Windsor was still a blight, but it was also a spot that had to be destroyed in order to have hopes for the government to wrestle the bridge monopoly from Moroun, which could also save part of the Sandwich neighbourhood. I'm not sure if saving Sandwich is in part of the government's plan. I doubt most of Parliament cares or even knows about the community slowly being eroded each day as the bridge's shadow crosses over it. What they see is a giant dollar sign.

On Indian Road, it doesn't seem like anyone really knows what's going on. Or at least, just the students I interviewed. They're living in a shadow of ignorance with the intention of leaving as soon as they're done with school. In the short stint they're here, they don't have time to care. Even Arshdeep, who stayed beyond finishing school, doesn't want to live here much longer. Is this street a community if people only live here for a few years and then leave, never to return?

And what does it mean when people don't even know why a section of more than 110 buildings across their street is shuttered? Has apathy won? When I first walked past this street in Windsor, I originally thought, "Hey, economic depression." But common sense prevailed; an entire street doesn't just get up and leave due to the economy, especially when that street is the best possible place to easily rent to students. Just Googling "Indian Road Windsor" brings several results that point to the problem, such as: "Homeowners surrounded by Indian Road 'slum' file lawsuit...", "Indian Road dispute prolonged after bridge company wins...", "Frustration over boarded up homes on Windsor's west-end..." The list of results about the Indian Road struggle goes on. There isn't a lack of information on the topic. But there's an abundance of laziness and apathy.



WITH THE WINDSOR POLICE FORCE, MEDIA REQUESTS NEED TO GO THROUGH THE MEDIA OFFICER.

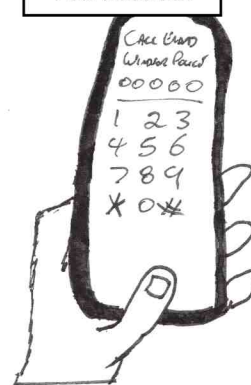


I LEAVE A MESSAGE.



OR AM TOLD TO TRY CALLING BACK SOME OTHER TIME.

FOR WEEKS...

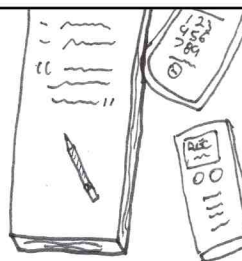


THIS WAS SO MUCH EASIER WHEN I WORKED AT THE WINDSOR STAR.

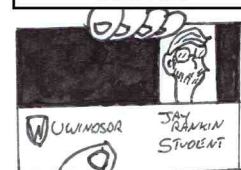


I'D CALL, PROVIDE A CASE NUMBER AND VOILA.

I'D USUALLY HAVE INFORMATION AND A QUOTE OR TWO WITH ONE PHONE CALL.



BUT I DON'T HAVE THAT ETHOS OF A PAPER BEHIND ME. I'M JUST A JOE SCHMOE.



WHICH SEVERLY LIMITS THE AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION TO ME.



## **V**

### **THE SKY IS FALLING**

It's still October, the same week that I interviewed the first block of Indian Road, and I'm heading south down Huron Church when I notice a section of asphalt under the bridge, between Huron Church and Indian, is closed off, with a lift truck underneath. And I can see someone sweeping the road.

It's not until I'm leaving town on October 10, on a train to Toronto, that I find out what the problem is: the bridge is falling. Or rather, it's crumbling. Much like Toronto's Don Valley Parkway, chunks of cement are also falling off this bridge and scattering across the road and sidewalk. An obvious safety hazard. A Paladin Security guard had warned me years ago about this, the potential of the bridge partially crumbling. Apparently the bridge had been closed on Monday, with some reports of debris having fallen. The city had been told it was an isolated incident, but apparently not.

My sister is travelling on the train with me. Emily pokes up from her seat when she notices I'm reading an article about the bridge on my laptop. She moved into Sandwich a little more than a month ago and we're taking the train home to see our parents for Canadian Thanksgiving. On Friday night she set out to 7-Eleven, which is across the street from the University of Windsor's Welcome Centre, only to be barred by the crumbling bridge. She still could have travelled to the store, but it would have added at least 10 minutes, each way, to her trip to skirt around the closed street.

The following week, my sister and I arrive back in Windsor. We make our way down Wyandotte, hoping that the street is, in fact, open. It's not. We turn right and head

towards the river. Donnelley is closed off. So is Peter. Finally, University Avenue is open. My sister jokes that to get to school she'll have to climb up the bridge, run across it and jump off the other side.

I wait for the bridge situation to cool down before contacting the city. It's Devil's Night, before Halloween, when Dwayne Dawson, the city's executive director of operations gives me a call.

"Concern was brought to us by a resident," he explains. "They had seen some broken concrete laying on the ground which had fallen from the underside of the bridge."

"So obviously you had to close the street there?"

My voice is hoarse and nasally as I have a cold and am having difficulty breathing. I was secretly hoping he'd call me back on Monday. It's around 4 p.m. and I thought he was going to be in a meeting until he left work.

Dwayne continues, "From that we went down, looked at it, picked it up, talked to the bridge. The Bridge Company said that it was a one time thing, that they were doing some work on it and that their contractor had an issue with their form. Their form had let loose and a couple pieces fell and that it was a one time issue."

The city listened to the Bridge Company, but started monitoring the area under the bridge. Around a week later, city staff found concrete scattered on the ground. They went to inspect underneath the bridge using a firetruck to lift a man up for a visual inspection. Following that, they closed the street on October 9.

Debris was found on other streets and the city decided to close all the streets under the bridge except for University Avenue and Riverside Drive, which are two major traffic arteries connecting Sandwich to the rest of Windsor.

The issue eventually turned into another battle in the war of words between the Bridge Company and the city. The city held a press conference, showing off chunks of concrete that weighed between 10 and 20 pounds, which surely is enough weight to cause serious damage or death to a person should it drop 100 feet from the bridge's highest point above Riverside Drive. The city also pointed out that a Bobcat was seen scooping up concrete, right before a visit from Transport Canada to inspect the bridge. Seemingly, the Bridge Company knew there was a problem, but didn't want to publicly admit it.

The vice chairman of the company, Moroun's son, Matthew, held his own press conference and said that the bridge wasn't crumbling and wanted the city to provide clear evidence. The fate of the decision for whether action would have to be taken on the bridge was in the hands of Transport Canada. Meanwhile, the Bridge Company flipped the argument to say that the city was playing a dangerous game, as if the city had made up the issue of the bridge falling apart. Matthew wanted the city to stop getting in the way of their bridge expansion plans, which are to level the Indian Road Area and replace it with a new truck plaza and a second bridge.

The problem with the bridge was eventually fixed when the Bridge Company installed wooden planks underneath the bridge's belly, meant to catch any falling concrete. A *Windsor Star* cartoon by Mike Graston captures the brilliance of this quick

fix, drawing a worker removing a “watch out for falling concrete” sign and replacing it with a sign warning walkers to watch out for falling planks.

Despite communal anger against the Bridge Company for essentially shutting down crucial roads to Sandwich and leaving their prized bridge in such disrepair, some people thought it would be best to grant the Bridge Company’s wishes to level the Indian Road Area and build a new bridge. Stephen Henderson, in an editorial for the *Detroit Free Press*, wrote that he’s worried that city officials’ frustration with the Moroun family prevents a possibly necessary two-bridge span across the river. Sure, there’s the government’s bridge scheduled to be opened in 2020. However, that’s still several years off and if the current bridge were to decay to the point it has to be closed, it would be a significant blow to the economy and security of the area, given it’s the busiest border crossing in North America, with just fewer than 10,000 trucks rolling over its arch each day.

Regardless of whether there’s a bridge falling apart under Moroun’s care, there is a community right beside that is crumbling while he holds the houses between his fingertips. And that community was almost completely cut off because of his company’s negligence.

A couple months later on a mid-January Sunday, I get the chance to sit down with my sister and quiz her about her experience living with the bridge’s woes. I meet Emily at her house after she’s done her morning shift at Tim Hortons.

My bike rolls up to the two-storey blue house shortly after 1 p.m. It's a nice ride, given it's the first time in a week that the weather hasn't been stuck in the negative double digits. Her house follows a tradition of student housing, which is common in the area. The landlord had purchased it while she herself was a student and now, after graduating and moving out, she rents it out to other students. The top two storeys have a few rooms that are rented out to women attending the university and college. The basement is rented out to several men. This is where my sister lives and occasionally complains about having to live with complete strangers.

I walk my bike around the side of the house, passing by a white picket fence. My sister is behind it, just in front of the house's side door, throwing on her winter coat.

"Do you want to come in for a second? It's freezing," she says.

"It's actually 0 degrees. It's not that bad."

I'm not lying for the sake of convenience. Less than a week before the temperature hit -26 C with windchill. Now, it's refreshing.

"Yeah, but your face is all red."

"Because I biked here."

She does know that I don't have a car, after all. I'm swinging by because I figured it'd be great to catch up and grab brunch. We walk a few blocks to the Dominion House. We sit down and thumb through the menus. I had thought they would have breakfast, but the closest thing I can find are Scotch Eggs. After the waiter comes by and we order grub, I start speaking with Emily about her stay in Sandwich—she's been here for about six months now.

“So tell me about your experience living here.”

“It’s just really cute. Quaint. It kind of reminds me of where we grew up in Port Perry. Because it’s got that small town feel, but it’s within a bigger city, so it’s kind of cool. It’s quiet, which is nice. Because you go closer to downtown and it’s really loud. It’s got that little grocery store that I like. It’s got cute, little pubs.”

I swallow a chunk of egg—our family is not keen on talking. “What about walkability? Because you don’t have a car right now.”

“Yeah, it’s good. The grocery store is a five minute walk. It’s a five minute walk to main campus. And then to my HK building it’s 15, which is pretty good.”

“So do you remember when the bridge was falling apart. How did that affect you?”

Emily laughs. “I kind of felt a little cut off from the world, even though they did build these things that we could walk under. It was sketchy. When we were coming home from reading week, trying to get around and figure out where we can actually go down and around, it was definitely an inconvenience.”

“How much longer did it take you to get around?”

“About five minutes. They built the walkways. I didn’t have to walk because mom was here. But they built the pedestrian walkways just in time for school, right? Because they knew there would be such a huge uproar probably. So it didn’t inconvenience me, but I’m sure it did anyone who stayed for reading week.”

Before the quick fix of wooden boards was implemented into the bridge, pedestrian walkways were built on the sidewalks to allow foot traffic to commute from

the east end of Sandwich to places like the university. Vehicles, however, were prohibited for a while. “So they built the walkways. How sketchy was that?” I ask.

“When you think about it, it was really sketchy because this bridge is falling apart and yeah, it’s only little pieces now, but what if something substantial happens? There’s thousands of trucks on there every day, something substantial is going to happen soon. And this isn’t going to help me if anything happens.”

“Yeah, you go splat.”

She laughs.

The following week her bike is stolen. It was sitting in her fenced backyard and chained up, yet the thief was somehow able to spot it and sneak in. All that’s left is her lock, broken where the woman or man attacked it with wire cutters. My mom had told me, so I text Emily. She replies, “Guess I don’t have any more excuses for getting a new bike.”

She’s trying to shrug it off. And she did actually need a new bike, as her gears hardly worked and the breaks were worse for wear. But I’m left wondering about crime in the area, as I’ve listened to numerous conversations where people express worry about travelling to the other side of the bridge, though it could just be the stigma attached to the Indian Road blight. News headlines do point to the occasional crime. In December there was a shooting in the area, leaving one person dead. When I worked at the *Windsor Star* last year, I wrote a story about someone mugged in broad daylight on Felix Avenue. In October there was a stabbing on Sandwich Street.

The day following Emily's bike theft, I give Windsor Police a call. They don't get back to me, but I peruse their site for crime stats. They have a map of the city where you can select a date range and the police mark where reported crimes occurred. I check for occurrences in the last 30 days and dots appear all over the Sandwich east end. In the 400 block of Rosedale, a block from my sister's apartment and right beside the blight of Indian Road, there was a break and enter on January 4. On January 7 there was a reported theft in the 3100 block of Wyandotte Street West, which is really close to the boarded Forster Secondary School. Two days prior, there was another theft on Laforest Street, just a block from Mill. A block it intersects with, 3200 Baby Street, is the location of a break and enter on January 17. And there was another vehicle theft the day before on Peter Street, the 3100 block which is just a few steps away from my sister's house. There were also several incidents pinged on the business-heavy Sandwich Street.

Two days after her bike is stolen, I'm able catch up with Emily. She meets me in my office and we pass by her place as we walk to downtown Sandwich. I look at her white picket fence along the side of the house. It's gated. Someone could have snuck in during the night, but it'd be tricky given the street is lit. It's now -1 C and snowing, a whole 14 C colder than it was two days ago. And as we're walking through the snowfall, I strike up the topic of her bike.

She had seen the bike when she left in the morning for class. It was Tuesday, February 2 and sunny outside. When she got home at 2 p.m., the bike was gone. The chain had been broken in two places, implying that someone had made more than one attempt and was willing to risk more time to nab her bike in broad daylight.



“I’m more upset about the lock.”

She’s also upset that beside her bike were two other bikes in better condition, belonging to her ex-downstairs neighbours. These bikes were also technically abandoned because her downstairs neighbours recently moved out and left their junk behind.

And then Emily jokes about the situation. “Mom called me earlier and asked if I wanted anything for my birthday. And asked if I needed a new bike.”

She was able to file a report online with the Windsor Police Service, but beyond that she can’t do much. She’s also not looking into getting a new bicycle until the summer, which she thinks she might be spending in Sandwich instead of going to our parent’s place in Port Perry, given she’s working at a nearby Tim Hortons.

We stop in the Bake Shoppe, which is right by the Dominion House. I had thought we could grab breakfast in this historic, French-style building but apparently that only happens on weekends. I buy a pack of cookies and give them to Emily. An early birthday present.

We continue our trek down Sandwich Street. We pass the location where the brewery is being built and stop. This is the first time I’ve noticed their new windows. Black outline and stretching up two stories. Despite the whiteout from the snow, it seems to glint with light. We hit Rock Bottom next door.

I ask her if she’s worried at all about living in the area. She isn’t really, but is more cautious. She does mention that she’s been freaked out by fires in the area. On Instagram last night she posted a selfie with the following caption: “Someone stole my bike, some creepy guy insisted on walking beside me and asking me how I am a hundred

times while I walked down an abandoned road at 11pm, pretty sure I narrowly avoided being murdered. I have 4 midterms coming up and a dead monster of a rat on my front lawn. But the wine I like was on sale so everything is going to be okay, it's all about perspective."

I'm not sure what to think.

Later that night I head back to Rock Bottom to meet up with some friends in my graduate program. Two creative writing students debate creating a poem together where they forget what they wrote and then burn the manuscript to ashes, finalizing the creation of the piece. While others jump in on the debate, questioning whether it's actually any different than burning a bunch of blank pieces of paper, I wonder about how important this community is to the creative side of the university. If the area were to die or somehow be separated from the university, it would damage both communities.

The university hasn't actually had a pub on campus since 2011. Sandwich, however, has five bars within a minute radius of each other. Each offers food, alcohol, a place to chat. Within this same, two block spread, there's also Mackenzie Hall, which features several arts and community events. Just last Friday, January 29, I attended a performance of *Everyman* that was directed by a friend who graduated a few years ago from the university. I'm also attending another artistic event next week, where I am reading poetry. A graduated friend and another friend currently in the program, AJ, are performing alongside Colin Smith, a poet from Winnipeg. Here, is the only community

and arts centre within walking distance of campus and without it, there wouldn't be an accessible place for students to both run and attend these important events.

I grab a handful of peanuts and crack them open. Meanwhile, I'm lost in my own grey matter, thinking about crime in the Sandwich area. Is it a problem? I ask Hannah and Justin, who are both in the bar with me. Hannah says, "No, Sandwich has been great to me."

"Everyone says that the general consensus is it's such a sketchy area. But I've never experienced that," Justin says.

AJ, who lives on the other side of the university, reminisces about an old bar, Stumble Inn, which closed down and is now the Barrel House. I'm not really sure what it has to do with crime, or anything to be worried about in the area, but at least he's happy about putting a dent in his wallet. He's obsessed with poetry, and sometimes I can see why the two go together: drinking and art.

The next day, I'm still thinking about my sister's stolen bike and try to follow up with Windsor Police to ask about crime in the area. I leave a message, but again don't hear back.

A couple weeks later, after calling, leaving messages and being told to call the next day several times, I finally get a chance to talk to the Windsor Police media officer, Sgt. Matthew D'Asti. I'm looking for some statistics for the Indian Road Area, but he says it's not possible to get them.

“It’s such a tough topic to say problems in the area,” he says. “It’s not just Indian Road, it’s city wide. And for us to just pinpoint in that area, it’s kind of unfair to the residents in that area. And we totally won’t do that. No question, there’s some abandoned homes there, if that’s what you’re getting to, but our position on it is that we encourage people who are seeing crime in the area or have any information about anything going on, obviously to call police. And then we’ll address that when we hear from it.”

I can’t really get any solid statistics for the area, but crime is present anywhere in a city, Windsor especially. But Windsor actually doesn’t deal with much serious crime, like homicide. In fact, in 2011, Windsor hit a point on September 27 where it went a whole two years without a murder. One murder did occur later that year, but according to Statistics Canada, Windsor was one of the five lowest ranking cities in the country for homicide per capita in 2011. A *Windsor Star* article contrasts this to our neighbour across the border, where on December 2, 2012, Detroit Police reported 358 murders for the year.

My time walking around Sandwich and living in Windsor has been relatively peaceful. However, there was an incident a few years ago when I lived in a house with a few friends on Bridge Avenue. The street is about 10 minutes walking distance from the university, on the side opposite to Sandwich. The first night we moved in, a friend’s car got broken into. The window was smashed and a few objects missing from its back seat. A few months later, while I was living there alone, I woke up one morning and realized a window had been broken in the basement. And then I noticed a TV, a Playstation and an Xbox were missing from the room. I called the police, they dusted for prints, but beyond

that, nothing could be done. For awhile, I thought this was the worst area to live in. But isn't that what anyone thinks about an area where they encounter adversity?

I was bummed out, scared when it happened. I was also making pennies at Tim Hortons, so the dollar value of everything, more than \$1,000, was a hit to the gut and most of my expendable income. My sister's bike wasn't worth that much, essentially scrap, but it's also a mode of transportation. And losing it is a loss of mobility.

I wish I could find some statistics for the area, but the police are dodgy. Is it the amount of work involved in crunching the numbers? Or are they scared of a political fallout on releasing information on this particular area? There shouldn't be a problem in compiling data that points to how a blighted area is affecting crime. All the police can do is show correlation, not causation. The Bridge Company shouldn't have grounds to sue. As for the residents, property values might drop, but it could identify the need for what the neighbourhood watches need to look for. Data is used to predict the future—and that might help save a life.

Preparedness is key for preventing any sort of disaster. If the Bridge Company actually maintained their bridge, it might not have fallen apart. Somebody could have died from their negligence. Regardless, the steel giant has been a rusting eyesore—for the longest time, not all the lights of its sign even worked. The “Bassador” Bridge arched over the Detroit River for years.

If the police would actually give me stats on crime in the area, it would allow me to see how the abandoned area fares. But it would also present information which could help the area's residents tell which sorts of crimes to prepare themselves against. Having

a house I lived in being broken into was devastating. I had to fight with my work just to have the day off so I could deal with the police and getting my landlord to replace the window. A roommate's TV was stolen and I felt responsible. More importantly, I was looking after a cat belonging to my then girlfriend's uncle. The cat escaped through the broken window and could never be found again. I felt terrible, responsible for everything, and struggled to sleep for months afterwards, jolting awake at the slightest sound. After the incident, I made sure that any electronic valuables were stored on the top floor and not in the basement. If I had known that I had a chance of being robbed, I would have done this sooner to deter any such incident from occurring.

## **VI THE TROUBLE WITH BLIGHT**

How do you stop urban blight? Or more specifically, what can the average person do who doesn't have millions to invest into business? I wasn't really sure what could be done, aside from nagging city councillors to care about one of their neighbourhoods, which isn't the most fruitful of attempts to fix the problem. But then I stumbled across the work of a group of people trying to bring awareness to the crumbling, unused facades of buildings all around the city.

Winter is in full swing and Windsor has been hit with its January dump of snow. I call up Katheryn Tisdale, a long-time Windsor resident who started gathering steam with a Facebook group just last month to document the city's blight. Since December, the site has gathered more than 300 pictures featuring uncleared rubble, abandoned lots, vacant buildings and empty storefronts across the city of Windsor. That same month she and her site popped up on CBC Windsor's radar. On top of directing eyes to Windsor's blight, Katheryn also likes to bring up the problem of city sprawl in Windsor.

Sprawl is a problem that has been affecting Windsor for years; people have to drive everywhere instead of walking to nearby necessities like the grocery store or bank. This is part of the reason why walkable communities like Sandwich have had it rough the past while. Windsor's population, which currently sits around 210,000, has not been growing for several years. In fact, the city has lost about 5,000 people since 2006. If anything, it's currently on a slow decline, though that might plateau. Windsor, like

Detroit, grew around the auto industry. The Big Three: Ford, Chrysler and GM, used to have a huge presence in Windsor.

Ford was the first to open up shop, as the automaker was born just across the border. The Ford Motor Company of Canada, which was technically a separate entity from America's Ford, started rolling out Model Cs in September 1904. At that time to sell vehicles within the British Empire, they had to be produced there. Ford City, a lively neighbourhood of workers, sprung up around the auto giant's assembly plant. This is where the 99-day Ford strike of 1945 took place, with 11,000 workers walking off the job and filling the streets to picket in front of the plant. They even took vehicles and blockaded the streets for two days, which resulted in the government calling in the military to help break it up. Essentially, this is where the union was born.

Sadly, Ford closed the plant in 1953, which led to the economic downfall of the neighbourhood. Drouillard Road, the main strip of the community, to this day is still littered with shuttered storefronts. Ford's only presence left in the area is a small engine plant. GM also had a gig in the city—the Windsor Transmission plant. This was built in 1963 but was shut down in 2010, when 1,400 people lost their jobs. The only automaker prominently left in the city is Fiat-Chrysler, who recently retooled their plant to pump out their new Pacifica minivan. In a city where its main industry has been on the decline for more than half a century, what's to draw people to Windsor and inhabit communities like Sandwich?

CBC points out that one of the first properties posted on Kathryn's site is Abars, an old, historic riverfront bar on the east end of Windsor. The building is also another of



Matty Moroun's properties, but the bar was owned and operated by two people, one of whom is the co-owner Cory Clarkson. The historic building, which has been a drinking home to historic, infamous and famous folks such as Al Capone and Babe Ruth, was still operating for years while appearing abandoned from the outside. Though it was crumbling, leaking and suffering from an inadequate heating system, the spot kept serving customers, despite the landlord's negligence of the place. Now the building is abandoned. Moroun decided to kick out its tenants, officially killing the historic bar, at the end of November 2015.

I catch Katheryn when she is in the middle of cooking something in the oven and speaking to her was rough as the connection kept cutting out between our phones. "So why did you start the Facebook page?" I ask.

"Just a real frustration with the ongoing interest and drive by city leadership to continue to build and develop on greenfield when we have so much empty space in the city," she says. "This is something that I've been noticing more and more over the years and when the first acute care hospital was proposed, it was proposed that it needed 60 acres of greenfield and I was very dismayed about that. Why does it need that much land? It doesn't need to be greenfield. And that has progressed, as you know from a very vague point on their website two to three years ago to an actual selected, proposed site on greenfield. And all this time, I've been thinking, 'My goodness, this is not good for Windsor. This is going to be very harmful. This is going to empty out another neighbourhood. It's going to leave another big hole. It's going to destroy more farmland.

It's going to cause more driving. And all this time that I'm seeing this, I'm seeing that there's more and more vacancies in Windsor."

Kathryn is talking about Windsor's new proposed mega hospital, slated to be built on green space near the outskirts of the city. Despite the loss of land for yet another building, this appears initially to be a great idea, as it is more accessible to the county area. However, it means the possible closing of two hospitals in Windsor, including one in the downtown core. The loss of these hospitals will mean two more large, empty holes within two communities. It also means the loss of essential, walkable services, which is important to have in the area. I don't own a car, but sometimes I still need to check myself in for a medical emergency, as I learned one September night when I walked myself to the hospital after experiencing some alarming chest pain.

"I feel that people are talking about it now, but we didn't for a long time," Kathryn continues, talking about the blight facing Windsor. "It's almost like people wanted to look away. They're there and they're everywhere and they're growing. One vacant property can be such a dampening effect on a whole block. It becomes like a virus."

"It's a hole in the middle of a community," I say.

The connection cuts out and there's 10 seconds of awkward silence. Her voice picks up. "So what's your interest, Jay?"

I'm not sure if I missed something important. "Sorry, I thought you cut out there for a second."

I explain the current project I'm writing on about the Sandwich community and the blight affecting its east end. "You've obviously seen what's affecting that area."

"Yes, it was many, many years ago, but I was actually the community centre director at College Avenue Community Centre for a few years. So I have a lot of warm feelings for the westside. I have a lot of respect for the history there and I love some of the architecture there and the people. I'm really fond of Sandwich."

"Well, it's a historic community," I say. "It's one of the oldest parts of Windsor."

The connection crackles again. "I'm sorry, I can hardly hear you," she says.

I continue, despite worrying that I might not be heard. "It's a historic area, but it's falling apart because if you go to Indian Road, everything's just abandoned there. And there are several other areas where buildings just aren't being used."

"You have these buildings just all over this area where people just appear to have walked away and not done anything to it ever again."

"What do you think this sort of thing does to a community?" I ask.

"It's almost like a virus. It affects everything that is around it, this vacant, underused property. The economic vitality is just sucked out of an area when it's got holes in it like that."

We talk about about her history in Windsor. Kathryn's family has been around the city for generations, dating back to around the time the Duff-Baby house was built. And then we touch back on the topic of the Facebook page and posting pictures of blight.

"The purpose is just to make it harder to ignore," Kathryn says. "I want people talking about it. I want people asking their city council members how this happened and what

they're going to do to stop it from getting worse. I know that there are some really great thinkers in the area and they get very excited and they have great ideas, but they're just too small a minority right now. We need everyone talking, putting more pressure on developers to look at developments and repurposing existing buildings and less at developing farmland. Until more people are more aware, that pressure is just not going to build."

Shortly after, we finish talking and say goodbye. The following week, CBC Windsor publishes an article notifying the public that two more Sandwich properties, large ones, have been scooped up by the bridge owner: the old and closed down J.L. Forster High School, as well as a nearby large industrial lot which was used by a waste management company. Moroun has increased his hold on the neighbourhood, snatching the two largest properties left in the area. There are only two significant properties left out of his grasp. One is the McDonald's that sits at the intersection that connects the bridge to the city's streets. The other is a large office building that used to house Sutherland, a company that handles the calls for AT&T.

Sutherland left Sandwich and moved downtown. An ex-roommate of mine actually works there and he hates it—a lot of people refer to the place as "Sufferland." At least downtown has access to a plethora of Shawarma places—some with a discount—and other food joints, as well as several spots to relax and grab a pint after a shift. Back in Sandwich, amongst the blight, there was only McDonald's within reasonable walking distance.

This was a residential area and not a spot of industry. Now I'm not sure what to call the area. Residential doesn't seem fitting. I have a feeling it houses more rats than people. Any industry in this part of Sandwich wouldn't have many options for people living nearby to live and walk to work—because who would want to? Sutherland, being a call centre, probably has a fairly high turnover rate. Moving downtown probably upped running costs, but there's also a good chance it reduced the flow of employees leaving the place, because they removed the sense of misery that comes with working in a building surrounded with urban decay. Everything else seems to have left—the high school and more than 110 families. Why would a business want to operate in a downtrodden area?

Part of the reason why this area has to be made residential again is to combat sprawl. The Indian Road Area is the perfect spot for plenty of students and people who work at the university to live. Students generally are in a low-income bracket, several of which fall below the poverty line, like I have for the past several years. Thus, owning a vehicle isn't an option. I would love to afford a car, but I haven't been able to when all my income has been going towards tuition, rent and food. But as spots like Indian Road are boarded up, options for students to live within walkable distance of the university shrink. Sandwich is the best community for students to live in because it has several services required for a walkable community like a decently sized grocery store and some medical facilities. But if students live on the other side of the university, where rent is generally more expensive, these people don't have access to as much unless they own a vehicle. I'm more fortunate than some. I'm fit and physically able, which has allowed me to bike just about everywhere the past several years. This has opened up the option of

several services to me, regardless of where I live. But I know some people don't have the same options that I do. Some people aren't fit. Some aren't physically able. Some people just can't afford a bicycle. And sprawl, essentially a city's uncontrolled growth, relying on people's access to a motorized vehicle, makes life all the more difficult for those who already have difficulties.

## **VII HERE WE GO AGAIN**

It's not even the end of January when Moroun and his domain over part of Sandwich makes headlines again. The middle of the month features headlines over the controversy of him purchasing Forster Secondary School, along with its massive football field and another large property in the area. The school is another piece of Sandwich Towne history, its brick walls having housed students since 1922.

The school closed in June 2014 because enrolment had been declining over the years, which isn't a surprise because the surrounding community consists of boarded up homes. The lack of liveable residences in the area led to fewer students within walking distance of the institution. The abandoned buildings would have also made parents reluctant to send their children to a school in such a downtrodden area.

The sale took place on December 24, 2015 when Progressive Waste Solutions, previously known as BFI Canada, bought the place for \$1.2 million. Within 24 hours, the PWS flipped the property for \$1 over to the Bridge Company. They also sold off an old property they had sitting across from the high school, essentially giving the area to Moroun. The controversy doesn't end there. When the school board put the building up for sale, they knew it might end up in the hands of the Moroun. The spokesperson for the Greater Essex County School Board even told the *Windsor Star*, "There was an awareness the bridge company would be a potential buyer."

To add to the problem with the school being sold, the decision to do so was made behind closed doors, during an in camera meeting. The general public didn't even hear

about it until several weeks after. The closed meeting also means that there is no record of who voted for what or why the decision was made. Most of the people involved, including the board chair and director, refuse to talk with the press and are essentially hiding behind their spokesperson. Here is a group of people who helped sell out a community and can't even bother to tell the public, the people who pay their salaries, why.

Apparently there was some form of legal dispute involved between the waste management company and the school board. The selling of the property was to help settle the problem, but the board doesn't go into detail about the situation beyond that. As well, the property was never publicly listed, meaning the sale of it was handpicked by the board and there was no chance of the city acquiring the historic location.

Moroun has been trying to weasel his bridge together, regardless of whether what he does is ethical or not. Sometimes, he even crosses the line of legality. On January 12, 2012, he and the president of the Detroit International Bridge Company Dan Stamper were thrown in the Wayne County Jail when Judge Prentis Edwards sentenced them for contempt. The reason they were found in contempt was that the company failed to comply with the judge's previous orders to connect the bridge to nearby expressways on the Michigan side of the border. They were let out the following day by the appellate court.

The last weekend of January 2016 ends with Moroun suing the City of Windsor. Again. The reason this time is that he himself is being sued by residents in the neighbourhood. The suit against him was filed in 2013 because people living in the area



felt that the state of his decaying abandoned buildings led to their properties decreasing in value and gaining less rent income. Some residents say their values dropped by up to 50 per cent.

What doesn't make sense is Moroun's claim that the city should have to reimburse him for any amount he has to pay the neighbourhood residents should he lose the lawsuit against them. Apparently the state of his properties is the city's fault. Yes, the city does refuse to give him permits to bulldoze the houses. But if he were to demolish the houses, the neighbourhood would essentially disappear. There would be a huge hole in it, filled with his industrial project, which would lead to more houses in the area being sold to him and demolished. As for the houses being in complete disarray, he still has the potential to fix them, thus removing the community's rot. But the billionaire is too cheap for that.

I call up the lawyers who represent Sandwich's residents. The office is Sutts, Strosberg LLP, which has an office in Windsor and Toronto. I receive a call back from Sharon Strosberg. But she can't speak with me until the following week.

Strosberg does, however, hand me a legal document, one of the several claims made against Moroun's company, The Canadian Transit Company (CTC). It's a spicy paper, suing Moroun for several million dollars. This is only one claim involving three residences in the area. There are several more claims beyond this. One of the last points in the paper catches my eye:

CTC's conduct is high-handed, outrageous, wanton, reckless, entirely without care, deliberate, callous, disgraceful and willful. CTC was motivated by avarice

and greed and treated the plaintiffs as collateral damage. CTC wishes to preserve, as long as possible, its monopoly in truck traffic and hundreds of millions of dollars in toll revenue while minimizing the expense to restore the 112 properties/houses in the neighbourhood in Olde Sandwich Towne by not complying with the *Building Code* and the Windsor Standard's By-laws.

The document reveals what the Indian Road Area was like before the Bridge Company started seizing houses, describing the neighbourhood as “an eclectic mix of students and professionals, many of whom were employed by the University, long-time residents and people looking to downsize and retire.” The claim points out that people maintained the “vibrant” neighbourhoods in the area and that there were previously no abandoned buildings.

The next clause states that around 2004/2005 is when abandoned houses started appearing on Edison Street until eventually all houses on the east side of the street were vacant. The document even uses the word “blight,” talking about how the abandoned houses spread to Indian Road. The following clause states that, “residents now feel they are living near, and in some cases across from, what basically amounts to a slum.”

Essentially, over a few years, Moroun stretched his hand over several blocks in this community, and like a disease infected and destroyed them. Now, it's a slum as the claim states, where rodents take refuge, as well as the odd squatter. As for property values, which seems to be at the forefront of the suit, two of the families claim their houses dropped by \$100,000, while the other says their place dropped \$125,000.

Moroun's domain is now much larger in the Indian Road Area than it was in 2013. With the single move he made with PWS, he gained control of the school, a football field and an industrial piece of land—essentially he purchased three blocks all at once. On Indian Road, he owns the majority of three blocks, a one kilometre stretch of land, as well as the bridge running right beside it. His land stretches beyond that, meaning this one man controls more than one kilometre of land in the heart of Windsor, but also one kilometre of land that is part of the oldest settlement west of Montreal. How is one man allowed to run a monopoly on a historic, residential neighbourhood?

If the lawsuit from the residents is weighed in favour of them, it will only cost the billionaire pennies. It's not going to fix the problem with the Indian Road Area, but it might offer some people a means to escape it. As for fixing the blight, that's up to the courts to decide. But what also seems to be missing is rhetoric from local officials on the issue.

Jump back a few weeks and I have the chance to speak with John Elliott, Windsor's Ward 2 councillor, which covers Sandwich. I called him, introduced myself and the first thing I mention is the abandoned properties on Indian Road.

"How is it affecting the area?" I ask.

"Well, it's just a blight. It's the blight and for property owners that live in and around—all the property values have plummeted. Like in and around that area, if you try to sell your house now, you couldn't give it away. Because it just brought the property values way down. I can imagine what's in those places, between the mould and the

rodents and the people getting in them and stripping them down. It's just a terrible blight. And something has to be done soon, we're hoping."

Blight, Elliot seems to love the word. But I also wonder whether he's actually taken the time to look at the crumbling buildings, as the only description he uses for them is the vague buzzword: blight. "If the Bridge Company tried to resell them, do you think they'd have to be demolished first? What do you think would happen?"

"I'm not sure. Probably boil down to what they look like on the inside. But you could imagine houses that have been—going into year 14, if I'm correct—sitting there through the elements. And no care at all. On the inside, as a homeowner, I can image that with no utilities on, it's very hot in the summer, very cold in the winter. I do understand the amount of mould that are in them."

"It would be insane," I say.

I'm not entirely sure why he thinks he'd only be able to determine their salvageability based on whether he could see the insides or not. Clearly, the outside of several is an indicator of them not being salvageable: foundations cracked, shingles and porches rotting, scorch marks stretch across some roofs.

"You'd have to go in there with an asbestos suit on or something. I'm not the expert on that, but I would gather that someone who knows more about it, they would probably check out the whole structure inside and out and make a determination."

Elliott thinks that it would have been possible to save the houses within the first few years of their abandonment, but now, after more than a decade, they're probably not.

“Whatever the elements haven’t done, the rodents have. You can imagine the amount of rats and things living amongst it. I understand there were some people actually got in and stripped them,” he said.

By stripping the houses, Elliott means the ripping out of wiring and pipes by looters who then sell the metal for scrap. A lot of old houses use copper piping for plumbing, which can fetch between \$2 to \$3 per pound. For the people ripping the interiors of the house apart, it hardly seems unethical to rob the place when it’s just going to be demolished anyway

“Would I want to buy one? No,” Elliott said about the houses and chuckles.

“The blight affects the property values of the area, but I also found it kind of separates Sandwich from the rest of Windsor. Because there’s just this one, abandoned road.”

Elliott explained that the decay stretches past Indian Road, which I already know, but as he points out, not a lot of people venture into the rundown community past Indian Road.

“Can anything be done as a community to deter what [the Bridge Company] is doing to it?”

“No. Actually, it’s a big chess match between the Canadian Federal Government and Matty Moroun, the Bridge Company that bought all the houses. So until there’s a decision made from our government, whether or not they’re going to allow the Ambassador Bridge to build a new span, that’s where the stalemate is. I’m hopeful that within the next year or so the Canadian federal government will tell the Bridge Company:

‘Yes, you can build a new bridge on our side’ versus, ‘No, you can’t.’ And whichever way that goes, everything else will fall into place. It’ll be like, ‘Okay, time to clean up the area.’ So on and so forth. The dominos will start to fall after that decision is made.”

“So what you’re saying is that whatever decision is made, it will help the community?”

“Yeah, either, or. Because then the whole chess match, the federal government will instruct the city on how things are going to go after that. You know, let’s just say hypothetically, Canadian government says, ‘No, you can’t build a bridge on this side. Then, you need to do a, b and c with the properties on our side.’ There’ll be a lot of what to do. As a community, we can’t control anything. We’re like the pawns in it.”

It sounds like it could be a saving grace for the community if the government rejects Moroun’s plan and tells him something has to be done with his houses. But if he wins, it also means the eradication of the blight. Though, it means there’s going to be a second bridge towering over the entrance to the community, which could make it seem even more isolated. This will be the case for pedestrians such as students who would have to walk an entire block without being able to see the sky.

Elliott and I chat a bit more about the general Sandwich area and then hang up. For the common person, there seems to be nothing that can be done to fix the problem facing Indian Road and the other streets littered with abandoned buildings. People can take pictures of the buildings, but all that does is raise awareness. They can sue a company and try to get reimbursed for their woes, but that’s not nearly a big enough dent in the company’s pockets to make it do anything. The only ones who can make a change

happen are the government or the billionaire who owns the properties. City councillors can raise their voices, gather media attention and try to send a signal to the Supreme Court, but what good is it if the only message coming across is that anything should happen with the street instead of vouching for a particular outcome?

The Indian Road Area is a problem, caused by a company purchasing a large section of a neighbourhood with the intent of building a bridge without even having approval to do so. To combat such a problem, the people need a voice. The city is locked in a court struggle with the man. But that was a previous city council that started the chain of events against Moroun. The current ward councillor, Elliott, don't seem to care about the community. He doesn't have an opinion on the matter—which is funny because he's elected and paid to have an opinion. He just wants something to happen and doesn't care what it is, even though a decision could further destroy the community. It could be that he sees his hands are tied and that everything to do with the bridge is already in the hands of the Supreme Court. The neighbourhood is locked in a legal battle for its future. Residents are fighting for a way out. And the city has to fight back against the bridge who blames them for what the residents are suing the Bridge Company over. Regardless, the city and Moroun are two large corporate entities with plenty of money and resources at their disposal. But the residents are caught in the middle of their fight. As individuals, they don't have much money. They don't have much time. And they have the most to lose from both the current problem facing the street and any future issues that could occur from the building of a second bridge. Yet, they seem to be fighting on their own, with not even the city councillor they elected to bother helping them out.

## **VIII ANOTHER NEIGHBOURLY STROLL**

It's a few days before Moroun's lawsuit hits the media that I venture down the streets of Indian Road again. I walk up the street, starting at Peter and knock on just about every door. One door, a young man about my age steps out. Shakes his head and says "No," when I ask him if I can talk to him about living in the area.

I'm taking this trek again because I want to speak to someone who isn't just a student or a recent graduate in the area. Months ago I went door-to-door and spoke with several students about their experience in the area. And what I found was the majority of people have no idea or just don't really care about what's happening across the street from them. What I'm hoping for is the chance to chat with someone who was here before the blight took over. It's a gamble. The majority of the doors I knock on don't have anybody home. And even if somebody is home, there's a chance that they don't want to speak with me, let alone the fact that it's still random whether they'll actually be a long-time residents.

As I walk past the house where the resident refused my interview, my luck seems to keep itself a few clovers short. Houses just don't seem to have anyone home, even though there's the odd light left burning in the middle of the day. I walk up the porch to one house in the 400 block and my spine freezes. To my left, across its rotten, wooden floor is a cart overturned with blankets, garbage bags and bottles pouring out of it. I creak across the floor to the door and knock. It's already open a bit and I can see inside the house. I knuckle its wood and push. It doesn't budge. I leave, figuring the house is



probably abandoned, yet the assorted pieces across the patio suggest that someone might live there, albeit illegally.

In the 600 block of Indian an older lady opens the door. She's patient, hears out what I'm asking her, but in the the end she says, "No, it's okay."

I almost don't knock on the next door. On its front porch are two plates of food for cats and a water dish. This is fairly normal in the area, as there are a lot of stray cats and people like to care for them. Tucked in the corner of the porch are several bins with holes cut in their sides to make cat shelters. In one of them a pair of glowing, yellow eyes stare back at me. I love cats, but sometimes they just creep me out. I rasp my knuckles against the door and a man opens. We start talking, but he wants me to keep him anonymous, though he says he would love to sit down and speak to me. I call him Joe Schmoe. He has lived in the area since 2005, before most of it was boarded up. He's busy, so I schedule an interview with him for another day, but that doesn't happen.

The 700 block of Indian is essentially all boarded up. A green chainlink fence covers all of the east side of the boarded up street, save one house which is still vacant. On the west side of the street, most of the buildings are also empty and under Moroun's rule, save a few. At one of these a boy answers. I ask for his parents; they're not home but he still wants to talk to me. I'm a little off about stopping at someone's house and interviewing a minor, especially when his guardians aren't home. My arms are a little shaky. A bit anxious. Sama is only 16 years old and he's braver than I am. I even forget to grab his last name.

"What has it been like growing up around here?"

Sama has been living on Indian Road since 2007. “Well, for one there’s not many neighbours to interact with. Well, there are neighbours, but we don’t really interact much.”

He points towards the river. “Farther down that side is mostly just university students who rent rooms. And on this side there’s just a bunch of people who stuck around. Gradually, slowly, I’ve seen that we’ve been getting less neighbours over time. Because people are chasing to move out and in the moment they do. The Paladin people just completely board up the houses and it feels almost surreal, really because one minute you’ll see the windows and everything, and the next day we’ll go over and it will be boarded up with wood. So I feel that it’s very sparse, but I can’t say it’s really a bad thing, either. Because I don’t feel like I’m missing out on much.”

“Does it creep you out at all? Having all the boarded up buildings around here?”

“Maybe for about the first year, but you get used to it very quickly.”

“Were you here before everything started getting boarded up?”

“Back around early 2007, there were a few people working those houses. The gate wasn’t there. They hadn’t installed it yet. There were a few people living in houses over there. But there wasn’t really any notable community. You could see that there wasn’t much of a neighbourhood bond going on. I’d say they put these fences up around 2009, 2010. And that’s when they had this entire side boarded up,” he points across the street again.

“What would you describe this community as right now?”

“Right now? Quiet. I wouldn’t say it’s sparse or sketchy. Or any of that. It’s definitely not spooky at night because you can walk it pretty easily. Honestly, I’m more terrified of the university students who could be passing by. But it’s just very, very quiet, you don’t see much going on around here. Except for the bridge, you can hear it now.”

Though it is a stereotype, the streets surrounding the university are quite frequently filled with booze-breathed students stumbling between parties, bars and their place to crash at night, especially come weekends. For a kid growing up, it can be pretty unnerving to run into one intoxicated person on the street, let alone a whole group of them walking together.

“Anything else you’d like to say about the area?”

“I’d like to see the houses get restocked. I’d like to see the houses get reopened. Mostly, I feel that it is a real nice neighbourhood as it is because you’re close to the university, you’re close to McDonald’s, there’s not much missing from here except for a neighbourhoodly bond. I feel like if we had more neighbours around, this could be an exemplary neighbourhood with nothing wrong with it.”

I didn’t think to ask him about Forster. He probably wouldn’t have been old enough to have gone, but he’s now at the age that he would be going there if it was still open. He waves me off and wishes me good luck on my project.

Once I hit the end of the street, I walk around the block and start walking north up Rosedale, which runs parallel to Indian and right beside it. Here, the frequency of shuttered homes is less, but still prevalent. I knock on just about every door that is still able to open on the right side of the street, hoping to speak with someone about the area

and Moroun's extended hold on it. One of the first houses I knock on has a large, black door. I flick the doorbell and flip through my notes while I wait. On the storm door I take note of a series of stickers, which I probably should have read sooner. The first sticker says, "I don't talk to strangers." It's a giant hand with a "No" in the palm, warding off door-to-door salespeople. Under it is a piece of grammatically incorrect literature, "Smile your on camera." I look up. Smile. Jot a note down. Under the sign is another, saying, "This door opens only by appointment." I pull out my camera and shoot a photo of the door while backing up. Someone clearly doesn't like visitors. Or grammar.

I continue walking down the street and a tall, blonde woman greets me with a smile as she opens her door. We talk about living in the area. She's a third-year nursing student at the university who's lived here for the past two years.

"So what do you think about this whole area here?" I ask.

"It's good. It's like student living, I find. Especially down these roads."

She's not wrong. Across the street, several houses are owned by my old landlord. I also cut the grass for several of these properties; I spent an entire day shovelling and wheelbarrowing dirt from a giant mound in one property down a block to another where it was needed to fill in around the foundation. In all that time, I never saw someone from the Bridge Company working on one of the abandoned properties on this street. Their presence is much less here, despite it being just a block away from their domination of Indian Road.

I point towards the street. And ask her what she thinks about the abandoned buildings. She says she finds it "sketchy." But doesn't have much to say beyond that or

know why the area is boarded up. I ask her if she's heard anything about the area and she says, "A few bad things. Before we moved here, we were told not to move on to this side of the bridge. And warned to stay on the other side. That was really about it, but we still moved here. Because it was cheaper."

I say goodbye about 10 times as I awkwardly leave. I'm at the end of the block and walk across the street to start another row of door knocking. I step up to one door, but can't. My heart's beating too fast and I let my social anxiety win. I don't really know why I can't deal with it right now. It's never stopped me from doing my job before. But I'm unable to. My hands are shaky and I can hear my heart thudding louder than a car driving by. I head back to the university and give up for the day.

On the weekend, right after news hits that Moroun is suing the city again, the weather is perfect. The sun is shining, the wind a cool breeze. When I bike to the university it's 8 C and feels like spring in January. I lock up and start my trek down Indian Road. I have a list of houses that didn't answer last time, that might have someone residing inside who might answer. But I keep walking. My gut feels a bit swirly and my heart's already up a few beats. I pass the end of Indian Road and make my way to Forster Secondary School. Several houses in the area are boarded up, but there are odd outliers that still stand strong against the blight. I walk past these. Circle the block. I can feel my chest pounding and my arms are shaky. I have no idea why the anxiety is triggering again, but I'm unable to even try to talk to someone. I give up, walk to McDonald's and ease myself with a coffee.

While I'm sitting there, I try to puzzle through what's eating at my grey matter. I do loathe door-to-door salespeople, but I know I'm not trying to con people into buying or doing something they don't want to. Door-to-door journalism was much easier when I worked at the *Windsor Star*. When a fire or something police related would happen in an area, I'd knock on several doors, introduce myself as from the newspaper and ask them questions about what they've seen or know. It was simple and it didn't matter who I was, because whatever I wrote was the voice of the paper, and they understood that. If they said no, it was usually in response to being quoted in print, and I understood that and didn't take the rejection personally. Now, however, I always have to explain my project, who I am, why I'm interested in it. Sometimes I have to list my credentials, like being a university student. People usually question the creative writing MA, but I add in that I worked at the *Windsor Star* last year, a name they know. When people say no to me, they're saying no to this project, my writing, something I've been working on for months. Here, they're not rejecting a newspaper that I happen to work for. They're rejecting me.

While walking home, I notice something I haven't seen before. A truck catches my eye as it shoots through the intersection that leads onto the bridge. A white pickup truck with a blue line running horizontally across its side. On the door is written "Ambassador Bridge Patrol Unit." I have no idea how long these trucks have been patrolling around the area, but it seems like it might be a replacement for Paladin Security.

The next week I try my luck with knocking on doors around the blight again. I pass by Graffiti Gandhi. He still looks at Indian Road in contempt. I walk the long, one kilometre down the street. No cars pass me. It's a warm day, and had been 13 C a few hours before, which is a bit odd for February 2. Now the clouds are starting to hide the sun. A strong wind pushes me back and rips leaves that should have been raked months ago from Moroun's properties and spins them in the air.

I travel up Mill, pass by Pizza Plus, a business that seems to glow alone in a sea of blight. I walk down Felix, where Forster and the waste management company are located. Several houses on this street are boarded up, as well as the streets that intersect with it. The Indian Road rot stretches far beyond the one kilometre street. The legal document that Strosberg sent me details the location of 112 properties that were owned by the CTC in 2013 by location. The numbers per street are as follows:

- 6 on Bloomfield
- 1 on Brock
- 1 on College
- 2 on Donelly
- 18 on Edison
- 8 on Felix
- 65 on Indian
- 3 on Mill
- 1 on Peter
- 5 on Rosedale

- 1 on University

I cross down Linwood Place, which borders the high school. Here, I knock on each door in the block. A mother answers, who moved here a year and a half ago with her family. She likes this area because of its affordability, but she's had a few incidents where her van has been broken into. However, being surrounded by blight doesn't bug her and she only really worries about crime.

"But because we're on the busy corner, we don't have to worry about it as much as, say, if we were in the neighbourhood," she points over to Pizza Plus. "That store's 24-hours, so we don't worry too much about the house. It's high traffic, which is good and bad. For the kids, it sucks, but for that reason someone's going to notice if someone is breaking down my door."

A kid opens a door and calls his mom over. I explain the project I'm writing, but she says "I don't like to be quoted."

I say that's okay and walk away. It doesn't feel like so much of a personal rejection, just someone who's had to deal with the press before.

A few houses down Brandon Smith answers. He's wearing a Gamespot t-shirt and pyjama pants, so I probably caught him when he's either relaxing or getting up for the day. He's been living in the area for three years and hasn't had any problems.

I point towards Felix. "You know how there's all those abandoned buildings just over there and the high school's been closed down? Does that bug you at all?"

"Yeah, I don't like that."



“You don’t like that? Did you ever go to the high school here?”

“No. I didn’t grow up in this part of town. It’s just shitty having all the blight around here.”

“Why did you move here, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“Well, it’s like family friends that own this house, so I got a pretty good deal on it.”

“Is there anything you like about the neighbourhood?”

“Well, the people are really nice. I run into some interesting characters, I guess. I’m pretty close to a bunch of bars, which is good. And I like to be able to walk around. It’s more walkable, this community, than when I was in LaSalle.”

I knock on several more doors, but nobody’s home on this block. I walk back to Felix and hammer on the few houses that aren’t closed down in front of Forster. No one answers and I get the feeling that no one wants to answer. One house has a locked, metal gate blocking the steps to the front porch. Another has the storm door locked and no door bell.

I really want to give up and park myself at McDonalds. My fingers are starting to itch and numb with cold. I would love the chance to wrap them around a steaming cup of coffee and let some feeling flow back through the digits. My heart’s also racing, breaking from its usual under 60 beats-per minute rate.

I turn down Edison, which also runs beside Forster. This street reminds me of Indian Road, with an entire side of the street owned by Moroun. I walk down the vacant side of the street first. Here, everything looks worse than Indian, as if several more ages

of neglect have been inflicted upon it. I stop at one building. Just underneath the roof, black scorch marks lick the structure. A green substance grasps around the base and up its brick walls. Almost as if the brick, rather than the wood, is rotting. I knock on a house directly across from this rundown building. On the opposite side of the street, it's like stepping from a horror movie set to the *The Truman Show*. This house is well maintained and just seeing, warms the chill from my hands. The pathway leading up to the porch is painted baby blue. The house itself is a mix between white and the same colour as the pathway, with blue wooden shingles on some of the walls. The porch is clean, with not a sign of broken or chipped wood. A few pieces of lawn furniture lie on it, new and organized in straight lines, perpendicular to the house.

I knock on the door and wait a minute. A man opens it. He's wearing shorts and a t-shirt. White paint covers his hands. I explain what I'm doing, going door-to-door and asking people about the neighbourhood. He invites me inside. He tells me that he's in the middle of painting, hence the hands. His name is Louis Driessen and he's lived in the area for 45 years. His wife had moved in with her family when she was just a kid. Louis bought the place from her father and now lives there with his wife.

"How have things changed around here over the years?"

"We live in a jailhouse, let's put it that way," he points out the door to the rotting facades across the street. "We've been looking at this now for 12 years. The price of my property has dropped more than 50 per cent. We can't move with the amount we'd get from the place. So naturally, we're suing the Bridge Company."

"So obviously, you're pissed off about everything that's happening?"

“There’s not much I can say. There’s fires. People are trying to get in the houses and living there. Wild animals. The Bridge Company, in the fall I asked them to clean up the leaves on that side. They keep blowing on this side. They don’t do that.”

“Yeah, it’s still there, months later.”

I look across the street, I see soggy, brown leaves blowing around. It’s just like when I was walking along Indian Road. Leaves that had fallen back in September are blowing across the street.

“You can see them from here,” he says. “They don’t take care of their side. It’s a big mess, so we’re basically waiting now. It’s going to go to court in the fall ... Patience. Maybe I won’t get nothing out of it, but it’s mostly for my kids. It could be another 10, 20 years. You understand that part?”

“Well, it could take forever.”

“It’s going to drag on and drag on. So it’s mostly for the kids.”

“How do you feel about what has happened here?”

“It’s been way past that. I feel horrible and there’s nothing I can do. The Bridge Company doesn’t do nothing and the City of Windsor doesn’t do anything. They could help a little bit too, but they’re not doing anything. Our councillor, the original councillor Ron Jones, he never even came over here to talk to us. We’re stuck.”

The current councillor is John Elliott. I had talked to him about a month ago about the Indian Road situation and he just wants something to happen—for or against the Bridge Company.

Louis continues, “They just went across the street and bought the properties without consulting us. They just went ahead and did it. Whatever you see, that’s what it is. They ripped all the copper wiring out of the houses. The houses are caving in. We just had a fire there.”

Louis is pointing right out his window. “I can see that, it’s scorched,” I say.

“No, this house, the new one here,” he’s pointing a bit father to the left.

“Oh, that one, okay.”

“We had a fire there about a month ago. And the whole back end is scorched off. And the whole block was blocked off with firetrucks. And we have to live like this. It’s like being in a jail.”

“And there’s fires happening all the time?” I point directly across the street to the house I thought he had been referring to. “That one over there looks like it was scorched too.”

“That was on fire. The corner house was on fire once,” he points to all the houses he can see from the window. “This house was on fire once. That house was on fire. And people just do this. And I’m more or less keeping my screen closed. And I’m more or less the neighbourhood watchdog right now. I make sure nothing happens, because I have a baseball bat ready to go. Because I’m mad enough to cause damage.”

He laughs. “I’ve had enough.”

“So you hope things turn around at some point in the future?”

“I can’t say that. I hope so, but what can I say? I should be living in the east side or Walkerville or South Windsor or somewhere. We would have been out of here a long

time ago if they had given us the same thing as they got across the street—we would have been out of here. But after that happened, we're stuck."

He holds his hand above his head. "Because our price went from up here," he lowers his hand below his waist, "to down there. As you can see, I keep the house up and good all the time."

Louis points to the back of his house. "I've got a \$150,000 price plus to this house. I got a gazebo back there. I got a pool back there. I got a car and garage back there. I've got a private fence. And they treat us like this."

"Well, you're keeping everything maintained."

"Look what I'm doing," Louis says, holding up his paint-covered hands. "I'm painting right now. So that's all I can do: keep it up. Because if anyone wants to see how I keep my house up, I don't give a darn—look."

"What do you think about the Bridge Company buying the high school over there?"

He sighs. "I never really thought about it because I'm too pissed off at everything else. If you think about it, that side of the street is bought up," he says, pointing across the road.

"Forster school is bought up ... The football field across the street, that belonged to Forster. That's almost a block size. And the same thing with Forster, that's almost a block. And they only wanted \$1.2 million, sounds a little fishy."

\$1.2 million is how much the school board received for the school, plus the football field, as Louis points out. Moroun had to pay a little bit more to buy the

properties from the waste management company the school board sold the places to. Still, that's a small price for him to purchase two whole properties, essentially two blocks, all in a single move.

"And they just went ahead and did it," Louis says. "And now, as I was saying before, that's all bought. We are a little path of houses in between Matty Moroun's property right here. This is all that's left, right here. From Felix to Brock."

Louis points around. "Because that's all Matty Moroun. This is all Matty Moroun. We're going to stand until we get what we want."

"You're going to fight?" I say, the question stumbling out of my mouth like it's a statement.

"That's right. I don't care if it lasts another 10 years. He's not going to get away with this. He wouldn't be living himself in something like that."

Moroun. The name is spoken in distaste like "he" is "He," some billionaire deity that prefers to create misfortune for us less wealthy mortals.

"No, well He created this," I say.

I ask him what his general thoughts are and he goes on again about his frustrations being stuck in a "jail" with no one to help. The stairs creak, his wife steps downstairs to our level. He tells her what we're talking about. "Oh, I see," she says.

"She's pissed off too," he says.

"In May, it will be 55 years that we've been married. And like I said, I bought this property almost 50 years ago. This used to be one of the best neighbourhoods in the City of Windsor, I can tell you that. This used to be all young couples with children. Every

house, both sides of the street. Everybody would get along, just like a big, happy family. But, now look at it.”

“Yeah, it’s changed. It’s been destroyed,” I say.

I want to say more, but can’t. I feel defeated, even though I never went through the transition of living in this neighbourhood Louis used to love. It’s not even my social anxiety that chokes up and quiets my voice. It’s sorrow.

“That’s the best I can tell you. That’s it.”

I thank Louis for his time. We shake hands and he points me to a few other houses on the street I can poke my head into. I walk down to the end of the block. The blight continues onto the next block. I stop at the only other long-time resident who’s home right now and knock on his door at the block’s corner.

A man opens, I tell him about how I’m writing this project as a university student, talking to people about their experiences living here. Again, I’m explaining myself and how important this project is. My heart rate shoots up a few notches. “I was wondering if maybe I could talk to you about that?” I ask

“About what?”

“About your experience living here?” I gesture to the vacant buildings. “The changes that you’ve obviously seen across the street?”

“I’ve already talked to tons of people about all this.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“Can I talk to you too—or?”

“So. Like.”

His hands are in his pockets. He seems hesitant. “Would that be alright?” I say.

“Yeah. OK, come on in,” he says, a touch of defeat lingering in his voice as he slumps his shoulders.

He invites me inside. The storm door creaks and we both step into his living room. His name is Wayne Bosmier and he’s lived in this spot for 40 years.

“What has changed around here?” I ask.

He pauses. “Well, I mean.”

“It’s sort of obvious what it is now,” I say.

“Look at Sandwich. I mean, lots of places are closed there. Jail’s gone now. Post office is gone. Houses are all boarded up. Schools are gone.”

“So you’ve seen the community fall apart?”

“Oh, yeah. My grandfather lived here, so it was all older people at the time. They eventually moved out and then people moved in. And then old Matty Moroun bought all those down that street. So it’s just been going on.”

“How long ago was it that you started noticing things happening over there?” I ask, pointing to the the abandoned buildings.

“Oh. I can’t remember the date. I mean, it’s been a long time. We fought. It’s gone to court and all that too. So I mean, I don’t know if anything is going to happen. He just keeps on buying. He just bought Forster last month.”

“Do you have any thoughts on that?”

“I don’t even worry about it anymore.”



“You’re just used to it?”

“The city won’t let them tear them down. I don’t care. The city should let them tear them down because they still have to get a permit to build something. But if they want to tear them down and just have land there, I would rather look at just land.”

“So you’d rather look at just grass than these buildings that are falling apart?”

“Oh, for sure. You wouldn’t get the wildlife and all that that’s running around.”

“Besides wildlife, is there any problems with fires or squatters around here?”

“There’s been fires here. Not a lot. I’m surprised, you know. We’ve had fires here and seen them on Indian Street.”

This is quite different from what Louis said—he had made it apparent that there were fires everywhere. But perspective changes from person to person. I’m not sure whose version is closer to the truth, so I scribble in my notepad that I have to interview a fire professional later.

“But you’re just used to the area. It doesn’t really bug you too much anymore?”

“No. I mean, they come and they cut the grass, they shovel, they do more than what the city people do.”

I chuckle a little. City bylaws say that homeowners have to keep lawns pristinely cut and sidewalks safe. And Wayne says nothing about raking leaves, which are currently blowing across the street from Moroun’s properties, like rust flaking away from a broken-down car.

“I’m serious,” he says. “If they want to tear them down, that’s the part I just don’t understand. So let them tear it down and let them have land.”

“Anything else you’d like to say about the area?”

“No. I mean, it’s been a good area. I don’t want to leave here. I’m in the middle now, so what’s happening next? Obviously, they say he’s not going to be allowed to build a bridge, but I think eventually he will.”

“Now, the property value. Are you involved in that lawsuit against the Bridge Company?”

“Yeah.”

“Did that drop a lot from all that across the street?”

“Well, the ranges have never really come into effect. But I’m sure it will. Like who would buy that when you’re looking at that. And behind me, now.”

“Yeah, it’s all around now,” I say.

“So you’re stuck in the middle,” he points across the road. “Those people, they got paid fair deal, which I don’t blame them. Hey, if someone’s going to buy your house for more than what it’s worth, you’re going to sell it.”

Wayne laughs. “Right? I don’t know what else to tell you.”

“What sort of community was it before it happened?”

“A lot of people went to Forster. The jail was there. The Post office was there. The grade school was over here. So it was busy, kids always walking by, went to school. But then dwindle, dwindle, dwindle. And not enough people went there.”

“And then Forster had declining enrolment and closed down,” I say.

“Yeah, it’s an old school too. I knew he was going to buy it. It was just a matter of time.”

Wayne knew Moroun was going to buy the school. As Anne Jarvis, a columnist wrote in the Windsor Star in response to the school being bought, “It’s not like the public school board didn’t know the bridge company wanted—needed—this property.”

“Hey, see what happens,” Wayne says. “You fight. You get the councillors. Everybody and TV comes down. You’re on the TV. You say everything. We’ve gone to city council. It was on the TV the other day. At the bottom of the television it said that they want to tear down one house there because there was a house fire and I guess it’s unsafe. But it wasn’t the Bridge Company, it was someone else that was involved with that—you know, a safety thing. If they want to tear it down,” he shrugs.

Months ago, I had a hunch that Moroun might already own the place and had been searching for articles that would point to this. I couldn’t find anything, however.

Wayne continues, “If they light it on fire, I’m sure it’s not safe for firemen to go in there. And plus, look at the roof across the street, how green it is. How much water has gone inside the house?” he points between houses. “And that’s rotted.”

“There’s no wiring, probably,” I say.

“The copper’s gone. People went in there. You can see down this street, people took the siding off and railings off the porch, eavestrough.”

“Well, it’s free scrap metal,” I say.

“It’s all money. People go there and take it.”

“I don’t think the Bridge Company cares. They just want to tear them down anyways.”

“Yeah. If it was just land, at least you could see through, right?”

Wayne starts talking about how Moroun is making a lot off money off the bridge tolls, even calls him a “smart businessman.” He pauses and slaps his thighs. “What can I say? If they tore it down. He bought them, like what can you do? If the city wanted to put a stop to it, why didn’t they buy them and rent them out to the university or something? Or tear them down and put a row of duplexes in there or something? Like, the city could have stopped it. They could have bought Forster. They could have torn it down, even had a park there. It’s a big piece of property, you could put a nice, little park in there. If they wanted.”

“Or keep it, because it’s a historical building.”

I don’t actually think the city had an opportunity to buy the building, given the school board made the decision to sell the property during an in camera meeting without publicly listing. But I’m letting Wayne rant and vent his frustrations. I thank him for speaking with me and leave his house.

It’s colder now. After a minute of walking to the university, my fingers are nearly numb. I stop at Pizza Plus to warm up and pick up a slice for the road. The pizza joint predates the blight, having been sitting in front of the roundabout at Felix and Mill since 2001. Recently, the exterior has been updated as the sign looks new, implying that it is here to stay, despite it being surrounded by several rundown, abandoned buildings. While handing \$2.25 in change to the cashier, I ask if the owner’s around. He tells me to come back later.

I swing by on Saturday to talk with the owner of Pizza Plus. He’s busy finishing up some work in the back, so I pick up yet another slice of pizza. Right after paying and

grabbing my slice, Mohamed Elmosri, the owner, comes out. I ask him if I can speak with him and he signals me to wait a minute while he runs to the cash at the other side of the building, which is Mill Express Convenience. The back of the store is also a laundromat. When he's done he walks over to me.

"I'm wondering what it's been like operating a business here. And how you've seen the community change over time?" I ask.

"Look, it is very good."

"It's a good community?"

"Yeah, it's a very, very good community in the west end. I've been here for a while, don't have no problem. I'm friends with everybody."

"Around here there are a few abandoned buildings that have popped up over there and the high school over there," I say.

"The high school is gone. The bridge has bought it now."

"Does that worry you at all or affect anything here for you?"

"I don't care, you know. Because it doesn't bother me. I have it really nice. Lots of students in the community in the west end. There's nothing good in the area. The only place is my place, you know. People like it."

"What do you love about being here?"

"I love the area. I love the people here. I love my customers. They are middle class or welfare, that's fine. I keep my price lower. I have good food. Good quality. And they like me too."

He also keeps the place looking fresh, as I pointed out that the front of the building seems to have been recently updated. As soon as our interview finishes up, he runs over to the pizza store cash to help a customer who had just walked in. For a pizza place in what essentially is a no man's land community, it sure is busy.

I'm scarfing back my pizza and walking back to the university as I think about all this. Pizza Plus is an example of survival in a neighbourhood where everything has been taken away and left to rot. The area's still liveable, and in some ways more liveable for those with little income because the blight has driven rent prices down. But it's also made life more difficult for some. Louis takes great care of his house, but it's only worth half of what he thinks it should be. Each day he has to get up and see the scorched, green, rotting bundles of brick and wood across the street. He can't move because he wouldn't get much of anything for his immaculate property and I bet he would jump at an opportunity to get out. He's pissed. I'm sort of pissed, too, even though I'm not directly affected. But he may have also exaggerated some of the problems. Whether it was on purpose out of anger or his memory is just selective to his woes, he seemed to pinpoint a lot of fires across the street.

It took me three separate days of walking up and down the streets to find just two people who had been there before the blight. Has almost everyone left? Probably, but I can't be sure. Part of what took me so long was the throbbing in my chest. I still can't be sure what exactly is causing it. It could be my worry over establishing ethos. I find it difficult to justify interviewing someone when I technically don't work for any media institution. Either way, I found some long-time residents who had a lot to say. I spoke to

Sama, too. But he's young and has always known the blight. And I don't think he'd be concerned about his property prices dropping.

Wayne, on the other hand, seems to have given up. He's suing too, but his slumped shoulders and the waver in his voice say that he's dealt with this problem for too long.

## **IX THE RING OF FIRE**

Speaking with Louis left me thinking, how common are fires in the Indian Road area? If he can point to just about every house on a street and say they've been on fire, there must be a serious problem. I've never witnessed a fire myself there, but I've heard stories from several people and seen residual scorch marks decorating some abandoned buildings.

But vacant structures can be targeted just about anywhere in the city. Arson is a crime which occurs about once a week in Windsor. The most recent crime stats listed by the Windsor Police state that in 2014, there were 52 arsons. The previous year saw 69 arsons. And 2012 had 67 intentionally set blazes.

Last year, the Sandwich area had a few major run ins with abandoned building blazes. On November 2, a fire struck a house late at night on Indian Road. It took 1.5 hours to extinguish the blaze and Windsor Fire had to cut holes in the roof to shoot water down into it. It was deemed unsafe because the building is vacant, so firefighters were unable to peg the damage estimate—not that the Bridge Company really cares about the interior of the buildings. CBC Windsor headlines their article about the blaze as, “Fire guts abandoned house on Indian Road,” implying that the damage was quite severe.

On May 10, fire crews battled three separate blazes at abandoned buildings in the area. Two fires hit the 800 block of Felix in the evening, while the morning saw another in the 3000 block of Edison. They were suspected to be arsons.

On August 25, there was another fire that struck a vacant building on Felix. Windsor Fire Tweeted that it was \$100,000 in damage and that an “intentionally set fire



originated on the first floor.” CBC Windsor quotes the Windsor Police saying that there were also signs that someone might have been living there.

Not all fires make the news. And the nature of spot news is it’s written when it’s newsworthy and then forgotten, so articles don’t usually follow up if someone is arrested or convicted in connection to a blaze—unless a loss of life occurs from the incident. It’s difficult—and unfair—to label an area just based on its news coverage so I wanted to include the thoughts from someone who actually deals with these issues.

I’m finally able to get in touch with the Windsor Police mid-February. The media officer puts me in contact with Detective Greg Meloche, who deals with investigating arsons, as well as fraud. Greg tells me that he doesn’t have specific statistics for the fires in the area. I was also hoping for something along the lines of having a statistic for how often abandoned buildings are targeted for arson versus non-abandoned buildings. But he tells me via email that it was not possible to gather such a figure. He does, however offer me an in-person interview. This is because he isn’t comfortable answering questions about the issue to someone he hadn’t met, which I’m completely fine with because I prefer to personally meet someone. Besides, I’m just awkward over the phone. It’s a hassle. Sometimes it crackles, cuts. And the speakers on my phone are terrible. Email doesn’t have a conversational element to it. It’s too thought out and the diction turns out completely different than if someone answers a question in person. In person is different. I can read someone’s eyes, body language, their habits, which adds to how they enunciate and helps me judge how and what to ask as questions.

I meet Greg on February 18, a Thursday morning, on the third floor of the police station, which is just a couple minutes from my apartment. He shakes my hand, leads me into his department and into a room on the right. I sit down on a large, dark leather couch.

The first thing we talk about is my project, how it's mostly come to focus around the Indian Road Area and its vacant, rotting buildings.

"There's not a lot of arsons there—at the end of the day," Greg says.

He pulls out a document, flips it open. "I can't give you this stuff. But after I talked to you, I started going through my list."

He starts listing the prevalence of fires in the area.

"Like, in 2013, there's only one arson that's in that area, directly related as an arson. And that was in June at 731 Mill that was a vacant building. There was other fires, accidental fires, or undetermined or not whether it was actually an arson. There was one that was related to drugs."

"In 2014, there's only two actual arsons," he flips a page. "But one of them was at the county jail, where somebody set a cell on fire."

"Oh yeah, I remember hearing about that," I say.

And I do remember. It was one of the incidents that had popped up on my news searches when I was looking for recent fires in the Sandwich area. I hadn't mentioned it because it was an isolated incident and had nothing to do with the surrounding community—just the closed one within the jail. Besides, the Sandwich jail is closed now, so risk of an inmate setting a cell on fire is nonexistent.

“We’ve others at the new jail, but this was the old jail. The only one would have been on Indian Road in October.”

“And was that 2015 or 2014?”

“That’s 2014 still. Then when you get into ’15.”

He’s flipping through the pages and says he didn’t total it up for that year, but he stops at each of the incidents he’s highlighted. “So you’ve got like a fence that was set on fire. That’s on South Street. On Bloomfield, somebody lit a broom on fire and left it on a porch. Now, on May 10 of last year ... there were four houses that basically in the same night were set up. And there were four people that are charged and that’s already gone through the court system.”

Greg continues, “In August of ’15 there was an unoccupied dwelling at 1610 Felix that was a set fire, but a lot of these things you can’t prove who did them. In November there’s a vehicle fire on Sandwich, that’s behind the DH. And there was a fire in November at the DH, undetermined. And then there was one at Edison in December that was an abandoned house that was set on fire.”

He taps the paper. “I’m never going to be able to prove it, but I’ve got an idea who.”

Greg takes a breath. “It appears that there’s a big problem with arson, but there’s not. Compared to the rest of the city, it’s not.”

I know arsons are prevalent throughout the city. When I worked as a weekend reporter at the *Windsor Star*, I generally had to write about one or more fires each weekend, which were sometimes arsons or suspected as being intentionally set. In

Walkerville, there was also a series of arsons which struck the area during my time working at there. I interviewed Chris Holt, the Ward 4 councillor, about the problem and he wanted to open up communication between police, fire and the people to prevent the issue. The targets at the time were small mom and pop shops. “We have to look out for one another, because nobody else is going to do it for us,” I had quoted him in an article.

The piece I wrote about the Walkerville arsons also highlighted intentionally set blazes by date that the paper had reported on from September to December in 2015. Out of those dates, 16 of them point to a day where at least one arson took place.

I direct the conversation with Greg to focus on the arson string. “A year or two ago in Walkerville, there was a series of arsons.”

“That was last year. It’s been going on for a while. The end of ’14 there was a bunch on Pierre, Wyandotte, Benjamin, stuff like that. Then it went into ’15. We caught the guy who was doing that and he’s still in jail on some charges. So that was what we would call an arsonist, but that’s not in the west end at all. That all in what’s the downtown east. So is there a predominate fire problem or an arson problem? No. You’ve got abandoned residences that are targets. And one of the questions you asked me was, ‘So over the past few years you’ve noticed a lot of arsons, suspected arsons targeting the boarded up homes in this area?’”

Greg looks at a printout of an email I had sent him, asking him about the prevalence of arsons in the area. “Well, there’s not a lot,” he says, referring to the list of arsons he had just run through.

The next question asks about how prone vacant buildings are to arson. “Well, the bottom line with abandoned buildings is there’s people squatting in them,” he says. “They use it sometimes for their drug houses. They’re drinking, the kids. One thing leads to another. You get some where there’s people squatting in them and they try to stay warm. And light them on fire. Sometimes it grows from there.”

Another question I had emailed him asked if he’d investigated an arson in the area. “Yeah, we’ve had arsons set there, we’ve had people charged.”

The following question is whether it’s more difficult to investigate an abandoned building. This question was sparked by when I spoke with Wayne, where he said that Windsor Fire isn’t even able to step into an abandoned building in the area to investigate the cause of a fire because its floor is unsafe and could collapse. Though, that was second hand news and I’ve had trouble locating an article to verify it.

“Well, it depends. A lot of those houses out near the bridge area, they’ve been abandoned for so long, they’re not safe. And there’s a lot of times where the fire department will pull up, realize it’s not a safe structure. They won’t send their people in. Why should they? Nobody’s life is worth a structure that can be rebuilt or something like that. So a lot of times the fire department will take a defensive stance and just make sure that fire doesn’t spread anywhere else. Well, at the same time, if it wasn’t safe for them to go in while it was burning, when it’s done burning, the structure is even going to be less safe. There’s no way me or my guys are going in there. So is it harder to investigate? Yeah. It’s harder to obtain samples and try to figure out how it started or where it started. Because it’s not safe to go in.”

I had told Greg in my email that I spoke to a resident on Edison that pointed out most of the buildings on his street and said they were on fire and that most were arsons. In retrospect, Louis didn't specifically say they were arsons, but he did say they were set by people.

"There's not that many ... He's probably someone that's upset," Greg says. "That everything around him is boarded up and there's fires. I mean that's just them, their feeling. You see a fire, it's because these places are boarded up. Let's deal with it. There's obviously the big political hot potato as to how they're going to be dealt with. Well, that's above my pay grade."

He moves on to the next question. "Now, you say that 'some people feel that burning the buildings is good riddance to an eye sore and gets rid of it in the area. But obviously fire is dangerous, what sort of problems and dangers can a fire pose to the area?'"

I laugh. In the email he had said that he wouldn't answer obvious questions. Though some of the threats of a fire are fairly obvious, I figured someone who investigates the problems from such potentially devastating events could shed more light.

He blows his nose. "Excuse me just for a second, I'm fighting this cold," he says, getting up and going into another room.

I hope I don't catch his cold, I have too much to write after today. But my focus is on the interview, so I don't let any worry over illness ruin my concentration. While waiting, I sit back into the couch's cushions and think on what questions I can spitball about arson or fire. A couple minutes later Greg comes back and gets straight to

answering another question: the problems and dangers of fire in abandoned buildings.

“Well, there’s the most obvious: death or injury. Right, people die. And you have to think about, who can die?”

He lists with his fingers. “The person setting the fire could die. What if somebody goes into a house, thinking it’s an abandoned house and lights it on fire, but there’s a squatter and nobody knows about them? That person could die. Neighbours, if it spreads, as well as emergency service personnel. Firemen, they put their life when they go on to a scene and they’re fighting a fire, it’s dangerous. And anybody else that’s there. They go to a structure fire, they go there fast because they have to get there before it spreads. Now you’re putting their life getting there plus other people that sometimes don’t yield to emergency vehicles. So you can see the repercussion of how it can effect.”

Death isn’t the only problem. “Plus, what if there’s an abandoned house on fire and it’s an old burning so it’s going to burn good? So there’s four, five trucks and another fire comes in. All my resources are tied up with one fire. So now it’s affecting me because it’s tying up resources.”

Beyond that, there’s the issue of dealing with a building after the fire. “Then there’s that place that burned. Now what happens to it? Is the insurance company going to knock it down? Is there going to be a fight. Are they going to rebuild it? In the meantime, what does it become? Another abandoned, boarded up building for people to squat it. You also get rats and all that comes around. So it’s just a big picture of things that happen.”

My next question is about what can be done to prevent problems with arson. What can the average person do to prevent these fires from afflicting their neighbourhoods?

“Public education. Letting people know what’s going on. Eyes and ears. If you see something, call somebody. Call the police and say, ‘Hey, there’s some kids walking around.’ It’s not always kids. I’m not picking on kids. Or ‘I just saw somebody walking in an alley, it’s three o’clock in the morning, dressed in dark.’ Probably not out walking the dog. So the number one thing that can be done is public education and getting people to be aware of their surroundings.”

He asks me where I live and Greg acknowledges that downtown wouldn’t work well as an example. “I live in Forest Glade,” he says. “If I see someone walking on my street at 11 o’clock at night that isn’t one of my neighbours, I know.”

“That something’s wrong.”

“No, maybe not wrong, but draws my attention to it. If I live out in the west end. If I live on Mill Street, up at the top end of Mill Street, and I see some people walking around, it might draw my attention. I don’t know they’re regular people around there. Because they’re the ones that know what’s out of place. Or if you see things that appear out of place. You go by one of these abandoned places and there’s a gas can sitting somewhere that shouldn’t be there. Well, it’s happened where someone went to do something, had the gas can, got scared off and went away. Well, maybe they’re going to come back.”

He restates that educating people to be neighbourhood watchdogs is a priority. “Obviously, if these places are secured properly, it will assist. Do you put fences up to secure around these places? Just boarding. If it’s boarded up and the boards are falling down, well maybe you need to come down and re-board it. I’ve always said, I like my



neighbours, but I'd rather someone break into my neighbour's house than mine. So I'll secure mine to the next I can to make theirs easier. And I wouldn't wish anything to my neighbours, but that's the sort of thing that's out there."

"And some of the houses on Indian do have fences around them," I say.

"Some do. Absolutely. Insurance companies do and the bridge has taken care of it. But that's that one little area. Felix has had a few. There was that one on Felix last fall, but it was people squatting in the place and using it for drugs and somebody lit it on fire."

"So arsons aren't as common as some people might think looking at the news?" I ask.

"Arsons go in patterns. Arsons for a lot of time you might not hear of any, but then all of a sudden you'll get some," Greg coughs.

"Like that one day you had four," I say.

"You got kids going around lighting up a bunch of stuff. No, are the numbers high? No. There's a lot of calls. A lot of damage."

Greg refers back to the year by year arson numbers. "'13 wasn't that bad. '14 was worse. Well, you got more abandoned buildings and they've been there longer. So what's going to happen in '16? I don't know. Hopefully, not. Hopefully they'll deal with them and go from there."

I finish with my last question, asking whether he thinks residents might ever get angry with the state of the area and torch a building or two. Across the river, that's a common occurrence, where residents burn down eyesore abandoned buildings.

"Who knows? There could be people. We're just throwing what ifs out there."

“But you haven’t had a situation like that before?”

“I’ve not investigated it where a neighbour has lit a house on fire to get rid of it. And I’ve been here 34 years.”

As for Detroit, “It’s a whole different game over there. They call it urban renewal. They burn these places down so we get new stuff in there. I’m not aware of anything here, doesn’t mean it hasn’t happened, of anything here where a neighbour has burned a house to get rid of it. Because you’ve got to remember, it’s putting my house in danger because fire spreads.”

We wrap up the the interview and I thank him for helping me out. He tells me not to shake his hand, so I don’t catch the cold he has. I also wish him a speedy recovery, as he’s leaving tomorrow to go on vacation.

I was hoping for solid data about how much of a problem arsons affecting abandoned buildings are to the area. Or even a yes or no answer to whether abandoned buildings are much more prone to fires. Greg said arson really isn’t a problem with the area. It happens occasionally, but can be something as little as a broom being torched. Fire itself poses a risk. The buildings are old and burn well. They’re unsafe for firefighters or other personnel to enter and fight or investigate. People light fires in them just to keep from freezing. But that’s not arson. That’s an accident.

So arson specifically doesn’t seem to be a problem that the blight really poses to the Sandwich area. However, human caused fires are. Or just fires. Greg seems to suggest that squatters are a serious problem to the area. And beyond that, the buildings are unsafe so firefighters can’t properly attack the fire, all they can really do is defend against it and

stop it from spreading around. And in the aftermath, the building is not only decimated, but it can't really be investigated as to determine what caused the burn. From a safety standpoint, it would make sense to allow the levelling of the area. If they sit forever, it seems like they'll eventually be wrought to combust. And besides, they're already rot. This situation could have been prevented if the Bridge Company had maintained the houses. It would cost a lot, but they could have made a killing in this more than a decade wait by renting the properties to students and the like. Renting to people would have meant that the buildings would be temperature controlled and have eyes on the inside to check for problems like fires or damage. The Morouns probably would have been blasted for being the city's biggest slumlords, but isn't that better than owning the largest urban graveyard?



THIS IS ME A  
PICTURE OF  
ME NOW.  
MONTHS  
AFTER  
STARTING  
THIS  
PROJECT.

LOOKS LIKE  
I'VE AGED A  
LITTLE BIT.

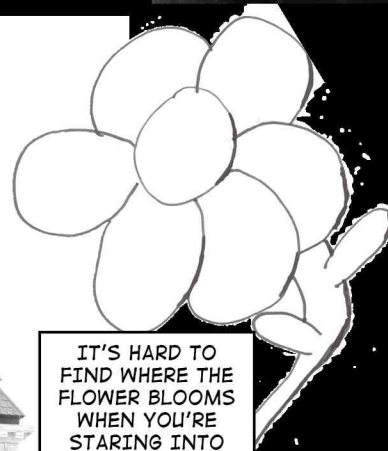


I'M SMILING FOR THE  
CAMERA. NOT FOR  
SANDWICH.

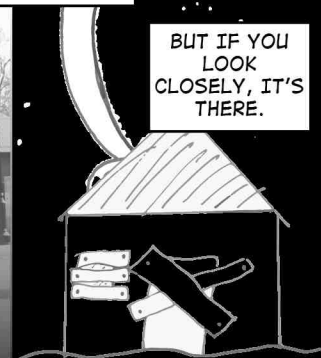
IT FEELS LIKE IT'S A  
TOWN DEFEATED.  
DESTROYED BY THE  
AMBITIONS OF A  
SINGLE MAN.



BUT EVEN A  
STREETLIGHT IS ONLY  
BRIGHT WHEN  
EVERYTHING ELSE IS  
DARK.



IT'S HARD TO  
FIND WHERE THE  
FLOWER BLOOMS  
WHEN YOU'RE  
STARING INTO  
THE SHADOW OF  
THE BRIDGE.



BUT IF YOU  
LOOK  
CLOSELY, IT'S  
THERE.

**X**  
**A NEW HOPE**

One January morning I visit Westside Foods. It's the independent grocery store in Sandwich, sitting at the corner of Sandwich Street and Brock. The store's only windows are massive and sit right in the front of the store. Streaks of light stretch down the main aisle, touching on the reds, greens and oranges of the fruit and veggie display. I see a man with a white apron come out of the double doors in the back and start walking my way. I stop him and ask for Jen.

He walks around and stops in an aisle, shouts down, "Hey, the man is here for the interview."

A woman calls back from one of the store's aisles and walks towards the storefront where the man and I are standing. "Interview?" she asks.

And then it clicks. At first, she thought I was someone coming to apply for a job. To a manager or owner of a store, that is generally what an interview is to them.

It's a Monday. I awkwardly laugh. "I forget things after the weekend, too."

I had asked her just last week if I could stop in and talk to her about becoming a new business owner in the Sandwich community. We introduce ourselves and walk past the cash registers, just by the windows. "So why did you move here?" I ask.

"Why not?" she says. "I was always interested in owning my own business and becoming an entrepreneur. And we've looked from Toronto all the way west. We decided not to go east because there's already a lot of developments east already happening. I think it's already had its time. I think anything west of Toronto is what's up and coming."

“I think Windsor was pretty high up when the auto industry was here and now with the auto industry picking up again, I think Windsor is going to be the next, biggest hotspot again.”

Jennifer, a 26-year-old from the Toronto region, had worked several years at Pusateris, an upscale grocery store in Toronto, and she wanted to start her own gig. Before that, she had also picked up managerial skills working at a Harveys in London, Ontario. Her search in Windsor involved looking at convenience stores and other shops. “We were online and we had seen that there was this grocery store and I actually have experience in grocery. That’s my background,” she says.

Jennifer and her dad drove down to Windsor one day she fell in love with the area and its history and saw it as an area to be redeveloped. “As you’re driving down Sandwich Street, it looks older. It looks like it has history. It looks like it has potential.”

“We like the staff, we like the store. We thought it was under serviced,” she says. “It needed a lot of work, no one had taken care of it for years and we thought it had needed somebody that was going to love it and care for it and I do.”

She was sold on the place, moved to Windsor in July and took over the store the following month. Since then, she has already seen to minor restoration work in the store, cleaning and fixing up its shelves, and polishing up its floors and hopes to do more work on the store that has been an essential part of the community for 60 years.

Jennifer isn’t the only newcomer to Sandwich I visit that day. Before visiting her, my morning starts with me frantically pedalling my bike across Windsor, trying to transport

myself from the city's downtown to Sandwich. It's a 5 kilometre trip with less than 20 minutes until my scheduled interview is supposed to start. Meanwhile, a chill works its way through my jeans and I cease being able to feel my legs. I'm able to let my heart slow down once I see the black street lamps that signal I'm in Old Sandwich Towne. I lock my bike up in front of Rock Bottom and pace myself to the Windsor Port Authority while scrubbing my face to unthaw the icicles encasing my beard. Biking on a -27 C day with windchill isn't the greatest of ideas.

The Port Authority sits at the intersection of Mill Street and Sandwich Street. They moved into the area about two years ago. I walk into the brick building and stand in a small entrance way. A secretary buzzes me through. I introduce myself and say I'm here to see Dave. She checks with him and I have to wait for a bit. I sit down in one of three brown leather chairs, opposite the secretary. I'm facing the door I just came in and the sun streams through the window, casting rectangular patterns on the brown and grey tile floor. The walls are a gentle beige and I feel like I can ease my shoulders back.

The secretary's counter is a long, black marble slab. On top of it is a glass jar filled with candy. My stomach rumbles and I regret skipping breakfast. Despite the room being part of a new office building, it's nautical. On the coffee table beside me is an issue of *Canadian Sailing* magazine. Dave comes in and we shake hands. He leads me down a hallway that branches off into other offices and has several pieces of artwork featuring boats hanging on the walls.

We sit down at a long, brown wooden table in his office with several chairs surrounding it. Beyond the table is his desk. Behind me are three more pieces of artwork

—all boats. The Port Authority is a federal entity and works to develop the port area in Windsor. “Why did you choose to move here?” I ask David.

“This really is where most of our business activity is,” he says. “Most of our land is just along here on Russell Street. Pretty much all of the port activity is this side of the bridge ... And we do a lot of work with Sandwich Towne, trying to promote the community, support the community by making it better, cleanups, developing park property along the river. We really feel like our business is part of the community so we wanted to have our offices down here.”

“Being part of Sandwich for two years now, what sort of experience has that been?”

“I think it’s been great. We do a lot of stuff with Sandwich. One of our staff members is on the BIA. We support a lot of local activities. We’re one of the main funders for the Christmas Parade. The Sandwich days in September, we’re a big supporters of that.”

Aside from contributing monetarily to local initiatives, the Port Authority also gets their hands dirty, cleaning up the community. Last year I had met the harbourmaster, leading a cleanup of the entire waterfront, what unfortunately is considered a dumping ground to some people. There’s a ditch with active flowing water that runs by Russell Street and people throw everything from old couches to toxic chemicals into its stream.

Part of what the Port Authority does is buy land on the riverfront and redevelop it for either leasing out to clients or having something available for the community.

Currently they’re working on redeveloping a plot of land right beside HMCS Hunter, the



naval reserve base, that's going to be a nice, small park with a fishing pier. "We've also done significant fish habitat creation along the river, kind of 1,500 linear feet of fish habitat over the last five years, which we think is certainly one of the biggest combined projects in the county, if not the largest over the last couple decades," David says.

The Port Authority has 12 active port terminals on the Windsor waterfront, 11 of which are on the Sandwich side of the bridge. These range from a salt dock, petroleum dock and a grain dock. "We bring in a lot of stone," David says. "Most of the stone that was used for the Herb-Gray Parkway and is currently being used by the plaza is being brought in by boat, a little barge dock just here around the corner on Russell Street."

David says that the port, which accesses the Detroit River and is close to two Great Lakes, is one of the top 10 to 15 busiest ports in the country, bringing in 6 million tonnes of material each year. This helps with Windsor's industries and is more environmentally friendly than trucking materials.

"You moved here two years ago and HMCS Hunter moved here just last year. Do you see Sandwich as up and swinging?" I ask.

"Oh, yeah, for sure," he says. "We actually worked for 10 years to get the Hunter down here. They're on our property, we leased that facility to them ... That was a great addition to the port and we think the whole area. We also worked very closely with Sterling Fuels, that's the petroleum handling facility down the road. They built a beautiful new office building down there and expanded their capabilities on the site and that's our property again."

HMCS Hunter signed a 60-year lease so they're here to stay, at least until near the end the century. According to David, most of the industry in the Sandwich area, especially on Russell Street, is port related. The main reason for this is because the downtown riverfront is populated by a park stretching for kilometres, while the east end has the distilleries of Walkerville and then shoreline housing stretches most of the way to Tecumseh.

The reason I'm speaking to Jennifer and David today is that they're part of new wave of businesses and organizations opening shop in Sandwich. David Grimaldi, the executive director of the Sandwich Improvement Area, recommended that I speak with these two people. The SIA is a Business Improvement Area, which is a provincially mandated non-profit organization geared towards sparking economic development, promoting and encouraging business in the area, as well as making it look great. I spoke with David just a week prior and had trekked out to Ford City to visit him.

Ford City is another neighbourhood in the Windsor area that suffers from problems with abandoned buildings. It had grown around the influx of business centred around people living near and working at the Ford assembly plant in the 1900s. However, when Ford closed the plant the area hit an economic rough patch and a walk down Drouillard Road, the area's main strip, will reveal many vacant storefronts. His office for the SIA is in the Gino Marcus Centre, which also doubles as his office for the Windsor Parade Corporation where he is the director of business development. The reason his

office is in Ford City is that he uses it as a base for both his positions, and also shares the space with other people at the Parade Corporation.

I walk through the doors of the centre. The first thing I notice is the smell of chlorine, signalling that there's a pool somewhere nearby. A fitness room is directly to my right. To my left is an assortment of gum ball and candy machines. Across the room is a reception desk. Further to my left is a series of thin hallways and signs, pointing me to the Parade Corp. office. The Gino Marcus Centre is a prime example of what can be done to flip and reuse, old, unused buildings. The centre used to be a school. After closing down, it was revamped to be a community centre, where several people hold offices for various organizations. There's a pool for public use and several other rooms for various community oriented events and activities.

I push open the door to Grimaldi's office. The walls are a light blue. On one sits a large clock. Another has various awards for the Windsor Parade. Two desks sit in the back wall and I sit down at a meeting table in front while Grimaldi finishes a phone call.

He hangs up and sits down with me. We start talking about what sort of town Sandwich is. And Gimaldi, like just about everyone else in the area, touts the historical significance of the settlement. Then we move to speak about losses for the neighbourhood, such as the loss of the post office, which occurred years ago, much to the community's dismay. "We're glad its being redeveloped, it's been sold to a private entrepreneur," he says. "And the Federal Government didn't do that building any favours because they let it—like with the Paul Martin Building—the inside of that building just fell apart. If you went onto the second and third floors it was unbelievable the disrepair.

So the new purchasers are putting a lot of money into bringing that building up to the historical level that it should have been all along.”

“Now, what sort of other businesses are sort of springing up and thriving in the Sandwich area?”

He lists off a few areas bound to spring with new life in the area. There’s the old fire hall, which was built in 1921. It was rebuilt after a fire decimated it 20 years later. And now, after sitting unused for quite some time, it is going to become the area’s new library. The building also sports a pre-1915 horse stable and stopped being used as a fire hall in 1964. The city’s investing between \$1.5 and \$2 million to restore the structure and shift over the library found in General Brock public school, which currently is inadequate for the community.

Another major investment in the area is a brewery, opening up in the space right next to Rock Bottom on Sandwich Street. “And that’s a huge investment because they tore that building apart. Structurally, everything is being redone,” Grimaldi says.

The building on the corner of Mill Street and Sandwich Street, directly across Sandwich Street from the post office, was also purchased by a new investor who plans to renovate the building. This is the old Robinet structure. Currently, it has a pita shop operating out of its storefront space and several apartments above it. There is also a 1970s era strip mall in behind the post office, sporting the bar Hurricanes and other shops, that is being renovated to look more in tune with the rest of the historic neighbourhood.

“The mere fact that the property owners are now starting to invest in Sandwich and in existing properties I think speaks volumes,” he says, adding that the area will look

put together. “Now Hurricane’s parking lot is getting refaced, the post office is getting refaced and the building right across the street from the post office is getting refaced. The Windsor Port Authority moved into the old CIBC building and they did major renovations there. So that corner, which is the hub of Sandwich Towne, is going to revamped, so that’s huge for that area.”

“Are there any barriers for the Sandwich community?” I ask. “Because I know right now just a few days ago news broke that Bridge Company bought two more buildings in the Sandwich area.”

“Yeah, the Bridge Company has their mandate that they’re still trying to get their bridge built and they’re still going to try to get their plaza built. And they’re moving ahead with their agenda. That’s something we’re going to have to move with a go forward basis. Obviously, the resistance is that if there’s the Gordie-Howe Bridge being built, it’s not going to interrupt with the livelihood of the people in Sandwich Towne. And that was the objective, to get the traffic and the congestion away from Sandwich Towne.”

He pauses for a second. “There’s a mentality that somehow Windsor stops at the Ambassador Bridge. And that anything west of the Ambassador Bridge is ‘not good—it’s a bad area.’ And that’s not true because these businesses wouldn’t be investing.”

Grimaldi mentions Jennifer, the new Westside Foods owner, and how she moved in from out of town to take over and improve the grocery store in town. He continues, “We’re trying to push the core services in Sandwich like grocery stores, like doctors, a pharmacy, all of the necessities that people need that don’t necessarily have transportation or can’t afford transportation—that’s what we’re trying to draw to the area.”

“So creating a walkable community, that’s what it’s gearing towards,” I say.

Grimaldi points out that gearing towards these sustainable, walkable neighbourhoods is what the city is working to achieve.

“Sandwich is also really close to the university. How student oriented is it?”

“It was very much a student orientated community. That was a large part of why some of the businesses opened there. Now with the university starting to bring students downtown, we’re going to have to rethink our strategy because we did target university students a lot in our marketing and in our thinking.”

Grimaldi is hoping that with the community becoming increasingly livable that more people choose to settle down in it. As well, help is being made available to assist homeowners spruce up their properties.

“Some people refer to the area as a student ghetto. So that would help with that?”

“Absolutely ... Now as we go through this renaissance I think it’s come upon us to get the message out that Sandwich is really starting to turn around.”

Then, I swing the conversation back to the bridge and its woes. “You said the bridge creates a psychological barrier between Sandwich and the rest of Windsor. And there’s all those buildings that are boarded up on Indian. Does that sort of further the effect, you find?”

“Absolutely, there’s no question. Some of the feedback that we’ve been getting is that as new families that come from the outside and they travel under the bridge, Indian Road is one of the first areas that they see. And then they start questioning, ‘Why are all these houses boarded up?’ It’s kind of the downtown Detroit mentality that it just went

through. But that's something that we have to look past because we know that that's in the courts and it's going to stay in the courts until it gets resolved. I think that we've used that as an excuse for far too long. And so I'm optimistic that with the investment coming from outside of Windsor, I think that people are seeing that there is potential not only in the City of Windsor, but in Sandwich Towne."

Two days later, I'm able to swing by Black Bench Coffee Roasters, which was another store Grimaldi recommended I visit. It's a small shop that opened up in 2014 and sits in the neighbourhood's core, between Brock and Mill on Sandwich Street.

I push through the door and the first thing I notice is that it's an extremely tight room. An L-shaped counter to my right splits the walkway for customers from the person working the store behind it. Each side has about enough space for someone to stand shoulder width. Right beside the window is the display of coffees available for purchase, brown beans resting in glass jars. I settle on the one called "Mission Dark," the bean roasted at the highest temperature.

As the man working the counter, James C. Mays, is pulling out a bag and starting to fill it with beans, he says, "Now, Jay, do not throw this bag away when you're done. Because it turns into a free amazing sock puppet."

He pauses. "We have three superheroes here at Black Bench, Caffeine Katie, her sidekick Misspresso and her superego Nabob, who's a coffee carrier. Everyday they take on the caffeine wars. And you can't meet them today. They're in court today testifying against the coffee killer, Tim McHorton."

“Ohh, the worst,” I say.

“It’s a horror,” he says. “And they come home in tears every night.”

I laugh. Start telling him about the terror of working at a Tim Hortons in my hometown, Port Perry. It was my first job and I worked there nearly full-time through high school to save up for university and continued to pour coffees during Christmas and summer breaks the first few years of my undergrad. I also worked at one of the donut shops in Windsor, right by the train station, and hated every second of it. And there was quite a bit of difference in the work environment between the two. In my hometown, I was actually one of the oldest people working there. It was relaxed, mundane even. In Windsor, on the other hand, I was the youngest and I kept feeling like if I didn’t overburden myself, I would be fired. To boot, I was a baker, who also did deli prep and had to run to the front counter to help serve people—which was three different jobs in my Port Perry’s store.

James tells me that his son lives in Port Perry, just a block from Lake Scugog. My hometown is a small community nestled around the manmade lake. It’s about an hour northwest from Toronto, which several people commute to and from for work each day. The town is part of Scugog Township, which includes the surrounding countryside and several villages like Blackstock, Caesarea and Seagrave. All together, the area has around 20,000 residents and not much happens there, save filming parts of the movie *Fly Away Home* and the blunder *Welcome to Mooseport*.



“You’ll notice a lot of similarities between Sandwich Street and the way they’ve laid out the main street in Port Perry,” James says, pouring beans into the bag and weighing it.

Like Sandwich, the town I grew up in has an, old Victorian feeling. In fact, on Queen Street, my Port Perry’s main business strip, the township has bylaws geared towards maintaining the look of its old, brick buildings. Several of the structures were built after a fire in 1884 destroyed 33 commercial buildings in the downtown core.

“Why did you move to Sandwich from Montreal? I ask.

He had first come down to Windsor in 2000 and spent a month researching for a book he was writing on the history of American motors in Canada.

“And I absolutely fell in love with Windsor,” James says. “It’s bilingual. It’s multicultural, I use my French everyday. And I don’t ever want to lose that. In Montreal you get very spoiled when you go down the street and there’s shops from 20 ethnic communities on your block, including a Korean supermarket the size of Zehrs. And Windsor has all that. Windsor has all the culture that Montreal does. You have to look a little harder sometimes, but it’s all here, except for ballet but that’s across from the river.”

“Why did you pick Sandwich, exactly?”

“Oh, because of the Old World charm. This does have a Euro feeling to it. A mix between the old Halifax and Paris. I just loved it. And it was very multiethnic and still is ... And at that time it was a complete community. You didn’t have to leave town. You could walk to the clinic, walk to the bank. There’s no bank anymore. You could walk to the library, to police services. Everything was within two blocks.”

James invites me to sit. I pay for my 1/2 pound of coffee beans and move behind the counter, sitting on a tall, black stool. And talk about the history of the area. He had previously lived all over Canada, including BC and the arctic. He moved here in 2004, because as he said, he liked the charm and walkability of the area, but also wanted to retire somewhere winters were a lot more bearable than Montreal, given Windsor is the southernmost city in Canada. I agree, Windsor's gentle winters are amazing—I did bike here, after all.

“When I first moved here, Jay,” he says. “It was December the 7 and I called friends in Quebec and I could hear the snow blowing in the background. And my friend said, ‘what’s that noise?’ And I said, ‘Oh, it’s a lawnmower. The neighbour is cutting his grass.’”

Chuckles.

We talk about the Sandwich neighbourhood and how it hit a slump at one point, but is now sparking its way up in a renaissance. As he said, there used to be a bank and police services in the community, but in the 12 years he’s been there, he saw that disappear. The post office closed. So did the jail. However, it’s not really a service that a walkable community necessarily needs.

Though the above services aren’t coming back, their buildings are finding new uses for other niches in the community. The CIBC building became the Windsor Port Authority. The post office is being restored, because Canada Post never maintained it, and is becoming a cafe, as well as a bed and breakfast—two niches the Sandwich community is missing. The area is seeing an expanded library, inhabiting an unused, historic fire hall.

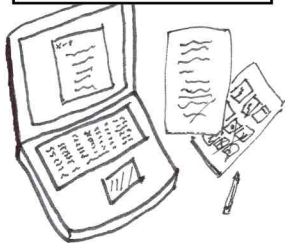
Even the old jail might be having its new use. Mays says that he's gossiped with some people that are doing some sort of construction work within its walls. The area also recently had a dentist open up shop, an important medical service to have.

I sit and talk with Mays for around 40 minutes. We laugh. And we talk about the area and just about every topic in between. After a while, I get up to leave, as it's dark and I have to bike home. He stops me, hands me a book he wrote, *Ford and Canada: 100 Years Together*, which is a historical diary about Ford's expansion into Canada. And he signs it. I thank him, say I'll swing back by sometime soon and head off.

As I'm biking home, the sun darkens and the street lamps take over. I notice that in the few blocks that make up Sandwich's core, there's a unity to it. The street lamps signal that I'm essentially travelling back in time, to a place where community was valued. Their black, straight poles look like they should be powered by gas instead of electricity. Most of the buildings in the area have a brick, Victorian charm. Or there's the odd spot like the DH or the Bake Shoppe built in the white, old French style with more than one chimney. And the sidewalks are wide, giving ample room for people to walk. Bicycle lanes also stretch from each side of Sandwich Street. But what's missing is the people. I can walk along the streets, along the old buildings and fancy streetlights and not run into a single soul. What the town needs is people living within walking distance to inhabit the streets, but sadly, a large chunk of housing space nearby lies forgotten.



I JUST FINISHED  
WRITING THE LAST  
CHAPTER AND COULDN'T  
BE HAPPIER.



AND IT'S NOT BEING  
DONE THAT'S  
WARPING MY FACE  
WITH A SMILE.

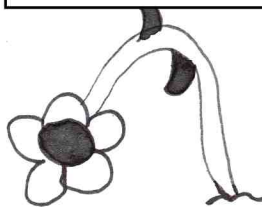


JUST A WEEK AGO, IT  
HAD DROPPED DOWN  
TO -17 C. I WAS  
ESSENTIALLY LOCKED  
IN MY APARTMENT  
WITH MY CAT, ZEUS.



IT'S THE MIDDLE OF  
FEBRUARY AND IT'S 17 C.

BUT NOW IT FEELS  
LIKE LATE SPRING...



A MONTH BEFORE THE  
SEASON HAS EVEN  
STARTED.



NOT SURE IF IT'S  
GOOD THING OR A BAD  
THING. IT DEPENDS  
ON WHAT ANGLE YOU  
LOOK AT IT FROM.



LIKE HAVING AN  
ENJOYABLE CLIMATE AT  
AN ODD TIME, EVEN  
SANDWICH HAS  
SKELETONS LURKING  
BEHIND CHANGE.

## **XI FULL CIRCLE**

It's been six months since I started walking up and down the deserted stretch of Indian Road. It's been two months since I led a tour around the neighbourhood, boots crunching as a bunch of classmates and I explored a couple blocks of Sandwich Towne. But it's almost the end of the school year. That's essentially a full year for me and I feel like I've come full circle and back to where I started this story. Albeit, I hope there's a change.

When I started this I knew next to nothing about Sandwich. Sure, I had my share of beer and grub here. I'd seen HMCS Hunter set root by the river. But I didn't know anyone here, or what the story was. Indian Road was just another area that had fallen apart on the Detroit River border.

But then my sister moved here. I started this project. My feet shuffled up and down the downtrodden streets, eyes taking in the roofs both crumbling and growing with vegetation. I went door-to-door, knuckles rasping wood, introducing myself to everyone I could find living amongst the blight. I listened to stories of moving here and of living here for years. And I hope I told them right, though I can never be sure. I can never present the story itself. Just a representation, boiled down to the letters and words I choose to show you.

I grab a pint and sit down in the DH's back room. I cough. My throat burns. I gulp my pint to ease my throat. Maybe I'm catching the cold that Greg had. Scratch that. I know I am.

Not all changes are good. Everything's different in the Dominion House. New tiles stretch across the main dining hall and the backroom. The last of which I had sat in with my friends when I was describing the more than 150 years history of this tavern. Gone is the table where we had sat, replaced with an old, scuffed pool table, complete with a fading Die Mannequin sticker. The table's not new to the bar. It had been in a different room before, albeit one that was so tight it was impossible for me to make half the shots with the cue. It's the little changes, sometimes just shuffling objects around, that make enjoying life easier. This is a good change, with the thought process of helping people, customers behind it. I like it.

Sandwich could use a little change. And it's in the process of changing. Old buildings like the post office and jail are being restored and repurposed. This is great, an act of preserving history, while also giving a community something new and needed.

But the Bridge Company, that's still there. And everyone knows it. Their expanse of forgotten buildings has been growing over the years, even increasing while I've been writing this project. It scooped up several large properties, consuming a neighbourhood like *The Blob* in that terrible 1958 horror movie. And the people I met, like Louis, feel the loss, the depression that has destroyed this area. Losing 50 per cent of your house's value points to this, obviously.

I'm sure there's a higher rate of fires for abandoned buildings in the area versus non-abandoned buildings. Arson is a possibility too. But I can't know that or the chances of any other crime along this stretch of road. It seems the police know the Bridge Company all too well and they're scared of being sued. At least, that could be the case.

While I'm typing this, two guys are playing pool right beside me. After walking close to me to cue the white ball, almost hitting me with the stick, one of them apologizes. That's a first. So is the Morouns' extension of the olive branch, which happens a week later. The Bridge Company is changing—possibly—though motives are questionable. That's always the case. A recent move was brought to the attention of the *Toronto Star* before any Windsor media. Matthew Moroun, Matty's son who had held a presser months ago about the bridge falling apart, sent an email to the Toronto paper. Apparently, the company is willing to put aside its previous gripe with the Harper era government and believe that Trudeau would be willing to “take a new look and a fresh approach to fix old problems.”

The fact that the dropping Canadian dollar is making its Gordie Howe Bridge project price tag soar could be one reason that prompted the Morouns to send the letter. Matthew seems to indicate that working with him, a private corporation with assets already lined up, could save the government hassle and money. It does make sense from a dollar amount, given the government is still dropping lots of money on building infrastructure leading to the site for the new bridge. Meanwhile, the 401 currently turns into Huron Church, which leads traffic both into Windsor and the bridge.

Is this a case of: an olive branch is an olive branch is an olive branch? Does it actually mean anything? Or is it just a ploy to get media all hyped up? A ploy would be most likely. Circumventing any Windsor media and trying to hit national news at the forefront hints at that. Either that or the Moroun family seriously thinks they fool the

government into an alliance that could either see the company's second bridge or them have a hand in the new bridge.

Whether Moroun is planning to get the government to back his bridge that would slice through Sandwich or to get in a share of the Gordie-Howie Bridge, is unclear from the little the *Toronto Star* has in their paper. And I doubt the company will ever be clear on their intentions until they get what they want and make the jump at whatever they have schemed. Matthew did, however, say, "Our company and the Harper government spent the last decade fighting unproductively. Our position was that the Ambassador could be the only bridge. The former government's position was that their 'bridge-to-be' would be able to pay back the taxpayers for the billions of dollars to construct it—even if Canada paid for the U.S. portion. We were both wrong and unnecessarily strident."

It sounds like he's trying to bury the hatchet, indicating that the Bridge Company is willing to give up their dream of singlehandedly expanding their private ownership of the continent's busiest border crossing. Or maybe they're just trying to sway the upcoming Supreme Court decision. Or perhaps he's just keeping his options open, in the event the court decision doesn't go the way the company hopes it'll land. Either way, change is coming and the company wants to make sure they're included in it. Hopefully, change here includes an outcome that doesn't leave the east side of Sandwich still rotting. Though, I doubt that's the case. So does Windsor, it would seem.

I get up and leave the DH. I'm biking back home, down Windsor's waterfront when I stop to breathe in the cooling air. This weather is rare for this time of year. A welcome change, though it's going to revert back to the freezing temperatures of winter



in a couple days. Winter is the death of plants, makes my veins retreat into themselves and even sets a cloud of depression that I try hard to escape each year. But eventually, winter passes. Flowers sprout from the ground. Trees bloom. I no longer cringe in pain when my fingers hit cold wind. I no longer watch the 5 p.m. sun set with dismay.

Maybe that's what Sandwich is in: a winter. Some of its old buildings are currently in slumber, their insides being torn apart and replaced so they can open again later. For grass to grow, leaves need to be cleared. Maybe that's what the stretch of blight needs: a clearing. Currently, the buildings are in no shape to be affordably refit as liveable homes. With no wiring, rotting floors and roofs, as well as cracked foundations, they're bound to cost more to restore than to knock down and rebuild. Maybe there could be a long park, stretching across the side of the bridge and university. Maybe people could live here again. Another bridge would just cast a wider shadow and bring the roar and choking diesel of more trucks towering over this community. The neighbourhood doesn't need that. And it makes more sense for the Gordie-Howie Bridge to be taking the extra commercial traffic instead of having it continually driven through Windsor.

I hop off my bike and walk over to the river. Behind me is the Ambassador Bridge. It's a silhouette as the sun falls beneath its arch, golden rays glinting across the rolling Detroit River. Part of the reason I love Sandwich and Windsor is that I can look across the river and see the sun towering over Detroit. I once published a poem, "The Tropics of Canada," that ends "i know i'm here because the sun rises on our side & sets on theirs." But each time, this sun is different. Better, even. It reinforces that sun I had seen before and before that. It's all the suns I have seen set here, stacking on top of each

other. But if the sun no longer sets on part of Sandwich, then what do I have to remind me of that history? All we are is all we were. And if the “were” to disappear, then what?

- 30 -

**CRITICAL ESSAY**  
**TRUTH AS A CONSTRUCT AND READING SUBJECTIVITY IN ALL WE ARE IS ALL WE WERE: THE BRIDGE AND BLIGHT OF SANDWICH TOWN**

What is “truth” and how is it constructed in a nonfiction story? *All We Are is All We Were* is a creative nonfiction work that tells the tale of a neighbourhood and its struggle as a corporate giant buys a large section of the community and leaves it to rot for more than a decade. While this is the core of its journalistic investigation, the work uses a clash between graphic narrative sections and prose to also tell the story of the writing process and question how it builds “truth.”

The question of “truth” and how it is built is at the heart of creating and reading many creative nonfiction works, especially in creative nonfiction comics. For example, Scott Chantler opens the first panel on one of the beginning pages of *Two Generals* with “All of this is true” (8). This frames the work as creative nonfiction by labelling it as “true” but also brings into question how truth is built in the book, contrasting the prose statement with a comic panel backdrop. Similarly, the first page of *All We Are is All We Were* shows a photograph of a sign which says, “Welcome to Windsor,” with a caption reading “This is where a true story starts.” The photograph frames the story as being situated in Windsor, Ontario, as well as the caption telling the reader that it is “true.” But this panel, in combination with following panels that are drawn instead of photographed in the opening of the work, bring into question whether “truth” can be objective or subjective. Joe Sacco, a comics journalist, prefaces *Journalism* by acknowledging the tension in crafting “truth”: “There will always exist, when presenting journalism in the comics form, a tension between those things that can be verified, like a quote caught on

tape, and those things that defy verification, such as a drawing purporting to represent a specific episode” (XI). By being recorded in a medium that is naturally seen as subjective, the reader questions the “truth” of comics. However, being in a drawn art form does not make the work fiction. As Randy Duncan, Michael Ray Taylor and David Stoddard write in *Creating Comics as Journalism, Memoir and Nonfiction*, “‘Fiction is always a made up story, and ‘nonfiction’ is always a depiction of reality, to the best of an author’s ability to discover that reality” (5). Simply put, though comics and creative writing styles are commonly used for fiction, they’re only fiction when used for a made up story. Creative nonfiction is a depiction of reality, but it cannot actually be reality. Therefore, both drawn comics and photographed comics, as well as prose can all serve to discover this “truth.”

Since nonfiction is a depiction of reality, I separate myself from the narrator within my work. For the purpose of this essay, “I” refers to myself, the writer of both this essay and *All We Are is All We Were*. When I refer to the narrator, I am speaking about the character Jay Rankin within *All We Are is All We Were* who speaks in the first-person voice. This character shares the same name with me, and also shares several characteristics and life experiences, but the narrator is not myself. It is a representation I wrote of myself, but it can never be me. This is important to realize when reading any creative nonfiction work: that the writer represented within it, as well as other characters aren’t actually the people themselves.

## WHAT IS CREATIVE NONFICTION?

As Lee Gutkind, editor and founder of the *Creative Nonfiction* magazine says in “What is Creative Nonfiction”:

The words “creative” and “nonfiction” describe the form. The word “creative” refers to the use of literary craft, the techniques fiction writers, playwrights, and poets employ to present nonfiction—factually accurate prose about real people and events—in a compelling, vivid, dramatic manner. The goal is to make nonfiction stories read like fiction so that your readers are as enthralled by fact as they are by fantasy. (n.p.)

As Gutkind says, creative nonfiction is just as based on fact as standard nonfiction, but the form uses fiction writing techniques to draw the reader closer to the story. This not only creates a more interesting work, but provides the reader with more tools to make meaning from the work. Becky Bradway and Doug Hesse write in *Creating Nonfiction* that, “Creative nonfiction makes no pretence of objectivity, the writer admits that she is coming from her own point of view. Writers want to bring readers into their worlds” (7). Where *All We Are is All We Were* and the general body of creative nonfiction differs from standard nonfiction, like journalism, is that they don’t try to disguise themselves in an objective writing style. Instead, they reveal the mechanisms that subjectively come to build the work, which shows the reader how the “truth” is created instead trying to pen it off as a non-debatable, falsely objective “truth.” *All We Are is All We Were* is a work that doesn’t just embrace subjectivity, but works to show the reader how the writing process affects meaning built from the work.

Standard nonfiction generally relies on an objective and impersonal voice, where the writer removes her or himself from the work. Creative nonfiction, on the other hand, relies on injecting the self into the story, commonly with a first-person voice, as is the case for *All We Are is All We Were*. The form also borrows techniques from fiction in order to detail one's place, opinion, and emotions. This doesn't make the work any less factual than regular nonfiction; what it does is show the reader how the writer comes to subjectively create the work. Gutkind writes, "Good creative nonfiction does not deny personal opinion; on the contrary, it welcomes the subjective voice" (1). Through a first-person voice, the writer acknowledges that her or his writing is subjective and opinionated, as well as that it uses personal experience to draw the reader into the story. This acknowledging of subjectivity and showing the work as an act of creation brings the work closer to "truth" for the reader because it does not try to mask itself under a false pretence of objectivity.

Creative nonfiction has many branches, ranging from reflective essays to memoir to literary journalism. *All We Are is All We Were* falls under the domain of the latter. Literary journalism is not a new form of writing, as it dates back to the works of Charles Dickens. One such work is "A Walk in a Workhouse," an 1850 account of a visit to a workhouse published in his magazine *Household Words*. In this he uses his experience walking through the poverty stricken building to detail a scene with conversation and description of what he saw. An example of this is, "On our walking into the midst of one of these dreary perspectives of old men, nearly the following little dialogue took place, the nurse not being immediately at hand: 'All well here?'" (1428). Dickens both sets a

scene and incorporates fiction-like dialogue to tell a nonfiction story. The language used here, however, is quite different from what is used today as common English vernacular has evolved since the 19th century.

In 1972, Tom Wolfe brought attention to the field of literary journalism, which he called the “New Journalism” in a *New York Magazine* article called, “The Birth of ‘The New Journalism’: An Eyewitness Report.” As he states in the piece, which republished the following year in his literary journalism collection, *The New Journalism*, “I doubt if many of the aces I will be extolling in this story went into journalism with the faintest notion of creating a “new” journalism, a “higher” journalism, or even a mildly improved variety” (1). At the time, magazine journalists, or feature writers, started writing their journalistic stories to read like fiction. He describes coming across a “New Journalism” story in *Esquire*, “The piece didn’t open like an ordinary magazine article at all. It opened with the tone and mood of a short story, with a rather intimate scene; or intimate by the standards of magazine journalism in 1962” (10). He further states:

By trial and error, by ‘instinct’ rather than theory, journalists began to discover the devices that gave the realistic novel this unique power, variously known as its ‘immediacy,’ its ‘concrete’ reality,’ its emotional involvement,’ its gripping’ or ‘absorbing’ quality. (31)

In other words, feature writers were using techniques from novels to turn journalism literary. In the 1970s, the genre took the world on several famous stories, including Hunter S. Thompson’s gonzo adventures including *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail* and *Hell ’s Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga*, which took literary journalism

several steps further towards being subjective. As he states in an interview published in *The Atlantic*, “Objective journalism is one of the main reasons American politics has been allowed to be so corrupt for so long. You can't be objective about Nixon.” Thompson’s works make his opinion blatantly available to the reader and show the “truth” how he saw it, often under the influence of drugs. The same decade as Thompson’s adventures was when another prominent literary journalism book was published, *All the President’s Men* by Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward which investigated the controversy surrounding Nixon and the Watergate Scandal.

Nowadays, literary journalism can be found in works such as *How To Breathe Underwater*, a collection of magazine articles by Canadian journalist Chris Turner, or a book-length story about the journalistic process, such as *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot. Though not specifically journalism, *Candyfreak: A Journey through the Chocolate Underbelly of America* by Steve Almond can also be considered literary journalism, as it uses the journalistic process of interviewing to build a narrative, though this story also delves into being an autobiographical piece about his relationship with candy. Longform, literary journalism also appears frequently in magazines. For example, several of Thompson’s adventures first appeared in serial form in *Rolling Stone* before being distributed as full-length books.

Literary journalism can also break free from the conventions of prose. Such is what Joe Sacco does in *Journalism and Footnotes in Gaza* where he cartoons his journalistic method as he explores places of crisis. The medium of comics plays with the reading of journalism in another way. Duncan, Taylor and Stoddard write:



The medium of comics as a tool to report, teach, or inform can be more greatly affected by style than other media. Focus can also affect “truth.” Sometimes artists or writers, in deciding there is a greater truth to be told, may leave vast swaths of detail behind. Through the use of style, focus, editing, or a combination of these, it is possible, and even likely that facts may become subjected to an overall truth of a given event, subject, or story.

Whereas techniques from fiction flesh out prose literary journalism, comics journalism is also subjectively affected by stylistics, both from how the cartoonist chooses to draw her or his subjects, but also what that person chooses to draw. The cartoonist is able show her or his perception of people’s reactions and emotions, as well as how events occur. This further brings into question “truth” as the cartoonist frames prose and drawn art together.

Because literary journalism is creative nonfiction, it still welcomes the subjective voice. Where the subjectivity in a memoir may detail thoughts and feelings on personal matters, literary journalism uses the self as a lens to look at the subject being written about. This is how *All We Are is All We Were* works, using the narrator, Jay Rankin, to explore the issue with urban blight in Sandwich Towne. “This looking outward helps distinguish the essay from pure autobiography, which dwells more complacently on the self,” writes Scott Russell Sanders in “The Singular First Person” (666). Details of the self, such as Jay Rankin telling the reader his personal history, are there so that the reader can understand how he works as a lens for the story. This helps the reader to engage with the text and question how “truth” is subjectively questioned through said lens.

Abby Alpert describes the use of fiction writing techniques in creative nonfiction as:

The strategies of fiction writing are used to recount the development of an idea, to investigate phenomenon, or to explore a piece of history. The storytelling element necessitates scene-by-scene construction, drawing character, finding a moving voice to communicate the drama, and conveying the facts in a way that will draw readers into a story. (26)

Fiction techniques aren't just used to entertain the reader, they serve to bring a closer relationship between reader and text. Tom Wolfe goes into further detail, describing pillars of the form in *The New Journalism*, three of which *All We Are is All We Were* primarily uses: scene-by-scene construction, realistic dialogue, and character details. Scene-by-scene construction is essential, as Alpert pointed out above. This is seen with the offset of the prose narrative in my work with the opening, "It's a crisp, -1 C night" (11). This is done even sooner with the comics section that precedes this, as every image creates a scene on its own. Using realistic dialogue is similar to what is commonly found in a novel or short story. This is done through every conversation described within my work, as they're transcriptions of actual interviews that occurred. Character detail is essentially everything that makes up a person. "This is the recording of everyday gestures," Wolfe writes, "habits, manners, customs, styles of furniture, clothing, decoration [...] glances, poses, styles of walking and other symbolic details that might exist within a scene" (32). An example of this would be on pages 94 and 95 when the narrator is attempting to establish an interview with Wayne Bosmier. Eventually the

interviewee is described as consenting to the interview as, “‘Yeah. OK, come on in,’ he says, a touch of defeat lingering in his voice as he slumps his shoulders.” This sentence does not necessarily tell the reader how Wayne particularly feels about the situation, but it shows it in the mannerisms of voice and body language. If this quote were to be presented without this, the reader would not be able to infer a possible emotional state of the interviewee, which informs how the reader understands the interview. With it, however, the reader is able to read Wayne’s words through the lens the narrator has provided.

This showing the body language of characters is what Joe Sacco works to accomplish in many of his comics journalism pieces. He draws the body language of himself, which helps the reader understand how he processes the story that he is interacting with. An example of this is on page 8 of *Journalism* he reveals himself as either scared or intimidated while hearing the details of UN war crimes trials (figure 1). Within the comics sections of my work, the narrator does not show himself interacting with sources in the story. What is shown, however, is some processing of problems involved in the journalistic process, as seen on page 47 when the narrator describes problem with getting an answer from the Windsor Police. One panel shows the narrator with a phone in hand and a question mark over his head and a blank expression, indicating confusion and even disappointment in not being able to get an answer. Two panels later, Jay is shown kicking a rock, indicating frustration (figure 2).

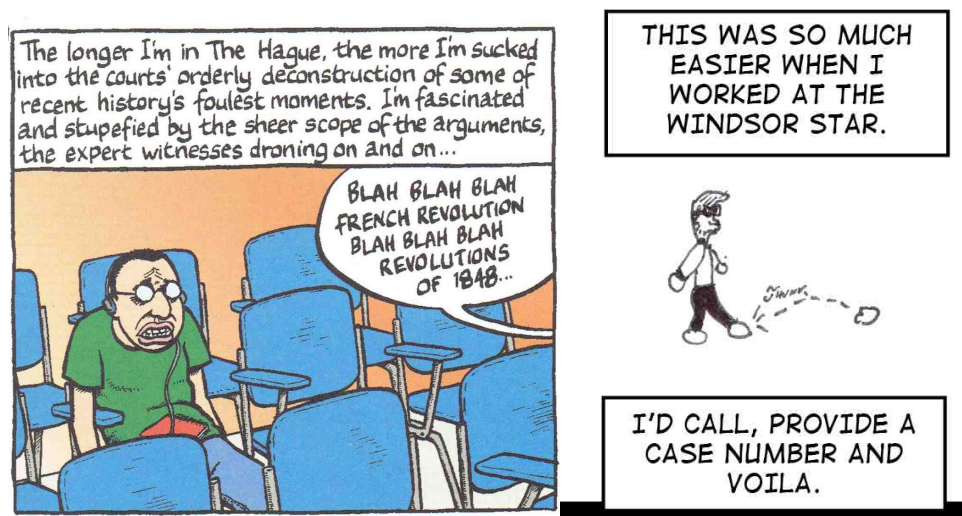


Figure 1: Page 8 of Joe Sacco's *Journalism*. Figure 2: page 47 of *All We Are is All We Were*

Both of these mentioned panels use bodily reaction to show the reader what the narrator is feeling while carrying through with the journalistic process.

## CREATING "TRUTH" THROUGH SUBJECTIVITY

The difference between author and narrator is one of the first points brought to the reader's attention in *All We Are is All We Were*. On page 6, the narrator shows a drawn picture of himself and says, "This is a drawing of me. A representation, sculpted by my hand and mind. It's not actually me, just what I'd like to reveal about myself." Following this is a photograph of the narrator and the caption, "And this, a photograph of me. One that was framed by my friend Andrew. It's also created by someone's hands and thoughts. I also chose to place it here." Not only is this bringing attention to the difference to writer and narrator, but it also tells the reader that both a drawn panel and a photographed panel are subjective, despite being two different art forms. Both have a human hand in creating,

as well as choosing whether to include or not include. Photography is not an objective art. Neither is cartooning. Following the panels that make the reader question this is a drawn image of the narrator juggling letters with caption boxes saying, “I’m the one writing this story” and “And I want you to remember all this as you read along.” Here, the narrator is also informing the reader that writing, like photography and cartooning, is a subjective act. In journalism, the writer chooses what and where to write, as well as what sources to include and not include. What this small section of panels communicates to the reader is that everything seen and read by the reader within this work is a construction based on reality, and not reality itself. This is an echo of a point that Scott McCloud makes in *Understanding Comics*:

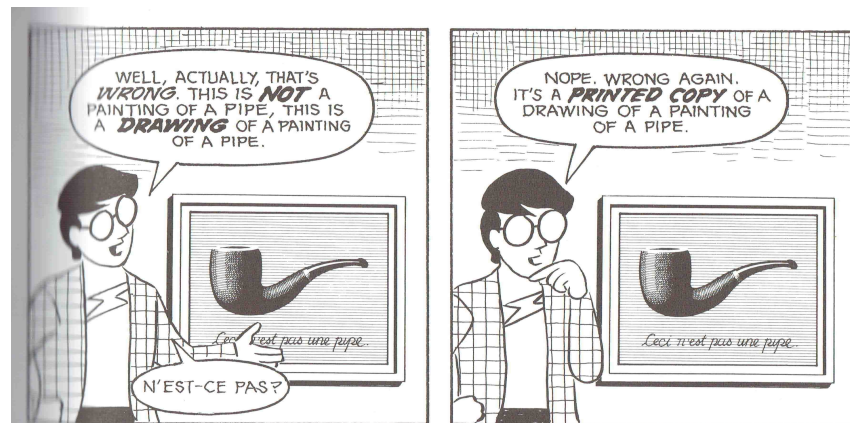


Figure 3: Page 25 of Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*.

Here, McCloud shows himself with a painting, *Treachery of Images*, albeit this is cartooned by him (figure 3). The painting's translation is “This is not a pipe,” which points at the art not being a pipe, but rather a painted representation of one. Here, McCloud takes it a step further, as he's not only drawn a representation of a painting that represents a pipe, but that the printing is a further representation of his representation of a

painting that represents a pipe. Similarly in *All We Are is All We Were*, any photograph is a representation of myself that is further represented in its collected, printed form. So is any drawn artwork, as is anything I had written to represent myself. All of these are just as subjective as one another.

As established, “truth,” is built subjectively. There is no objective “true” story. But creative nonfiction gets closer to the “truth” by embracing its subjectivity and revealing itself as an act of creation. I break the process of building “truth” into three levels of subjectivity: source, author and reader.

### **FIRST SUBJECTIVE LAYER: SOURCE**

Sources are necessary for all works of nonfiction because without being based on “true” sources, a work is simply fiction. Any source recorded by a human is subjective, whether it is a video, photograph, written text or any other medium. The reason it is subjective is that the creator chooses what to record and what not to record, as well as how to record. The filtering of reality is subjective. Within creative nonfiction, the author governs what is “truth.”

Sidney Dobrin and Christian Weisser further echo this, writing, “All reality, including nature, is discursively constructed” (268). Chantler and Sacco construct the “reality” of their creative nonfiction story, as I do. Even with mediums outside of comics and text, like in photography, the photographer chooses what is within and not within the frame. In comics, the illustrator also chooses what and how to frame, as well as how reality is depicted in a drawing; a writer also frames a story. To flip back to McCloud, a

drawing or mention of a source is a representation of that source and not the real thing.

As said above, all of this is established within the opening section of *All We Are is All We Were*. However, though creative nonfiction comics and prose are both subjective and reveal subjectivity, in *All We Are is All We Were* the two mediums operate differently in telling the story.

There are several ways to show sources within a work. The narrator in *All We Are is All We Were* primarily shows the source when he interviews them and speaks with them. The first instance of which occurs on the third page of the prose narrative, where Jay speaks with Hannah. A more formal interview occurs later in the chapter when the narrator speaks with Hannah and Justin in the Dominion House, asking them questions. Here, the narrator is showing his journalistic process of interviewing sources and showing the reader where the information comes from. Jay also shows the reader how the source reacts to him. For example, the Wayne interview mentioned earlier shows the interviewee as carrying an air of defeat. The reader then is able to infer that this would affect what the interviewee would say, as well as how the narrator might interact with him through the questioning process, which would further affect what information Wayne might provide.

Some sources, however, are not people, as sometimes the narrator refers to and sometimes quotes from documents. This is seen prevalently in chapter 7, when the narrator references and lists descriptions of the Indian Road Area issue from the court document provided from the law firm Sutts, Strosberg LLP. This paper has been created based on interviews with the clients involved in the lawsuit. Therefore, in writing my

work, I technically subjectively pulled information from a legal document, which was built using the subjective views of several interviewees.

Some sources aren't mentioned. These can be websites, news articles and the like which help to provide information such as when a building was built. For example, in the first chapter of *All We Are is All We Were*, the narrator lists several dates as to when historic structures in Sandwich were built, but doesn't list where that information came from. These would have come from websites pertaining to the businesses, as well as the city's historic directory online. Some sources don't provide any information towards the work, but influence it on a process level. These sources aren't mentioned within the main body of the story, but some are mentioned within a paratext—the acknowledgments. The acknowledgements section is crucial to understanding how process forms a creative nonfiction work, and sometimes is the only indication of what sources built it, which helps the reader garner a better understanding of how “truth” came to be constructed within the work. Such is the case in Chantler's *Two Generals* because his narrative only mentions the self within the last few pages. He uses the acknowledgements section to tell the reader which documents helped to craft the story, such as “the 1943 diary of Law Chantler; Jack Chrystler's 1944 letters from France to his wife,” but he also lets the reader know which sources helped influence process. One of these is “Nancy Morrey, who kept me company with good conversation on Thursday nights in the officer's mess as both of us pored over the War Diary.” Without this, the reader would have no idea as to what sources Chantler used to create the work, as well as what was present to affect him during the process of research and creating.



Laura Micciche writes about this use of acknowledgments in “Writing Material,” discussing how the effect of physical matter is hardly discussed in writing theory. She writes, “Right under our noses, writers reveal the ordinary and extraordinary forces that make writing possible. The expected nature of this mundane, overdetermined genre offers unexpected insights about writing” (488). Further, she adds:

Odd confessions and occasionally maudlin expressions of gratitude aside, acknowledgments present a unique view of writing practices and writers as enmeshed in varying partnerships with others, organizations, animals, feelings, sound, and places. Partnerships that constitute the very condition of writing itself. (489)

Micciche argues that acknowledgements, though a formal convention required in most book length publications, are used to reveal forces that subjectively affect the writing process. Though it is a paratext, it is paramount to understanding part of the process involved in creating *All We Are is All We Were*. In writing the acknowledgments section, I tell the reader what helped influence me but what would have not fit within the narrative. For example, I mention a “thank you” to Dale Jacobs, my thesis supervisor. This informs the reader about a crucial person involved in the back-and-forth editing process within the work. But it also lets the reader know that this was part of the thesis process, which isn’t mentioned at all within the narrative. I also thank my cat, Zeus. This character is referenced within the story, which allows the reader to infer that he’s present in my thought process as I write the story. Further information about how he affects my writing is provided in the acknowledgements line, “And Zeus, I know you can’t read this, but

thank you for keeping me company, jumping in my lap and asking me to pay attention to you, even past midnight while punching out pages for this project. You kept me sane.”

The acknowledgements within *All We Are is All We Were* allow the reader to understand subjective forces that were essential to creation of the work, but not essential to include in the story. The mention of the thesis supervisor both allows the reader to understand that there was someone who helped the intense revision process of the work, which would have shaped the direct outcome of it, as well as it being part of a social system that would have less directly affected it. Mentioning the cat allows the reader to understand a physical, moving entity that would have been constantly interacting with—and distracting—me as I crafted my work.

While the author chooses what to include from sources and reveals this subjective act to the reader through the narrative and paratexts, there is another subjective act within this layer of creation. The reader herself subjectively affects the telling of events.

Duncan, Taylor and Stoddard acknowledge this, “A story about the past, even the author’s first-hand experience of that past, can only present an approximation of the experience” (154). If I were to interview someone about their experience with an event that happened last week, they would make the subjective decision to speak with me or not, but what they would tell me is also a representation of what happened, boiled down into what language they believe would best communicate it. Duncan, Taylor and Stoddard bring up another point regarding this: “Memory is imperfect and often self-serving. Cognitive Dissonance theory holds that most people engage in selective recall, tending to remember the details that justify their decisions and tending to forget

information that makes them feel uncomfortable” (155). Not only am I receiving a subjective interpretation of events funnelled through the English language when I interview someone, but that interpretation is based on what their memory retains and forgets.

## **SECOND SUBJECTIVE LAYER: AUTHOR**

In *All We Are is All We Were*, the reader is shown several of the sources that affect how the work is created. What the work also does is show the reader what’s in between source and reader: the author, myself. Or rather, the reader is shown a narrator, the representation of myself. The narrator is first introduced to the reader through the beginning comic narrative of the work.

Comics, by nature, are reflexive, whether creative nonfiction or not. As Matthew Jones writes in his essay, “Reflexivity in Comic Art”:

[R]eflexivity will be conceptualized as a process by which the author of the text and/or the audience of the text functions to call attention to the text as an artificial construct. The key distinction here is that this definition places agency in the hands of individuals (author and audience) rather than in the hands of a neutral artifact (the text). Reflexivity is not something that is located in the text itself; rather it is something that the author engages in while creating and the audience engages in while consuming. An individual audience member can experience reflexivity regardless of whether the author had any intention of that effect. (270)

Reflexivity within *All We Are is All We Were* informs the reader that it works to build “truth” instead of simply being “truth.” And while Jones’ essay refers to reflexivity in comics, reflexivity can also be applied to some creative nonfiction, as is the case with my work. The author is paramount to subjectively affecting the work. While sources affect what information is available, the writer chooses what sources to use, as well as what to include and not to include from the sources. Four of Jones’ types of reflexivity work to reveal the role the author plays as a creator of the “true” work: authorial awareness, demystification, intermedia reflexivity and intertextuality.

Authorial awareness is the author’s act of placing him or herself within the text, which, “instigates self-awareness by calling attention to his/her own existence in the text” (Jones 271). This is quite common in creative nonfiction, even where the author tries to remove the self from the text. It’s the case in *Two Generals* where Chantler introduces himself near the end of the book, writing about his grandfather Law, the story’s protagonist, “He and Marg had three sons, who gave them four grandchildren, one of whom is the author of this book” (132). Here, Chantler introduces himself as being the one who subjectively penned the book, as well as a familial relationship between story subject and self, which would have possibly directed a bias towards favouring the protagonist in the story. By revealing this to the reader, the creator is able to make what Thierry Groensteen call arthrological connection, a “translinear or distant” relation, to this and all preceding panels, retroactively influencing how previous panels are interpreted (22).

In my story, I start by introducing myself to the reader and my relation to the story's subject, giving the reader information upfront so that what subjectively affects myself, the lens of the story, is known to the reader. This is what the entirety of the first comics section is about. The first five pages use a combination between images and text to help the reader understand what and where Windsor, Ontario is. On page 4, the first mention of "I" is used in a panel, "I call this place the 'Tropics of Canada.' Sadly, palm trees don't actually grow here." Here, the narrator introduces himself as creator and also two pieces of opinion about the area. One, he finds Windsor to be relatively warm and "tropical" when compared to his experience with the rest of Canada. And two, he realizes that it isn't actually tropical and seems to resent that. What this panel also does is create an arthrological connection between itself and the last page of the book, as the narrator says on page 125, "I once published a poem, the Tropics of Canada, that ends 'i know i'm here because the sun rises on our side & sets on theirs.'" Though Groensteen's arthrology is meant for comics, it still creates a connection between the two mentions of the text, allowing the one panel to both introduce the narrator and connect it to the work's creator and another work of the author. This carries throughout the work until it comes full circle with its mention in the last chapter.

A stronger, comic based arthrological connection is made on the page following the "tropics of Canada" panel. On page 5 are several drawings, as well as a photograph, of the narrator in the first section, which also occur in subsequent sections. Each time the narrator is shown, it creates a relationship between each panel, stitching them together. This is what Groensteen calls "braiding." It also shows changes in the narrator. In the

beginning Jay is shown as clean-shaven and jovially juggling letters, whereas halfway through the work he is shown as bearded and visibly frustrated. This relationship shows a passage of time and changes in both appearance and attitude. This arthrological connection also connects loosely with the text as each mention of the “I” is similar to a drawing of the self.

Therefore, each drawing or photograph of the narrator creates a relationship between each instance it appears, which affects the interpretation of each image. Furthermore, this creates a link of authorial awareness, showing the reader the links between the creator behind the text.

Demystification is “the act of revealing the mechanisms of production responsible for creating the particular text” (Jones 276). This is seen in the same section of *Two Generals* where Chantler reveals himself as author, where he shows a panel that reveals the very tools used to draw, which surrounds a drawn photograph, which was used in a previous panel (figure 5). In my work, I created something similar, where in the comic preceding the last chapter, I have a panel saying “I just finished writing the last chapter and couldn’t be happier” (figure 4). Furthermore, within this panel is a computer, the main device used in crafting prose, as well as a sheet of paper with what is supposedly writing on it and another piece with panels, representing the panel and prose sections of the work. Both pieces of paper seem to have parts crossed out a pencil sitting on top. This shows a process of not just cartooning or writing, but that of revision, which is important to fabricating a work. Again, it is important that like any references to a source or the self, the tools shown are not the actual devices used, but representations.

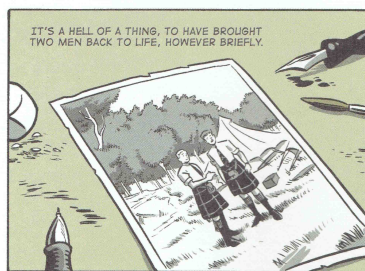
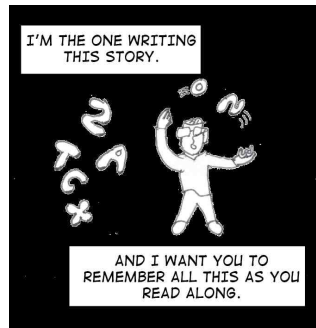


Figure 4: page 132 of *Two Generals*.



Figure 5: page 47 of *All We Are is All We Were*.

As Jones writes, “It is important to realize that the author “cannot include his/her body in the text” (278). And further says, “whenever a text seeks to demystify, it will always offer another mystification in the place of the first” (278). Demystification isn’t just the showing of tools used to create a work. It can also be through showing the process of creation. Sacco accomplishes this by showing himself interviewing his sources and experiencing the events he writes about. Though the comic sections in *All We Are is All We Were* do not feature the narrator interviewing people or directly exploring Sandwich Towne and the Indian Road Area, the prose sections do. This shows the reader that process that subjectively builds the story is not just a process of writing or drawing, but one of research. And within my work, these prose sections are also written in the present tense. However, when the writer sat down to write these, the interviews were obviously something that had happened in the past. Also, within this section of my work is a fabrication of story, used to draw the reader more into the immediacy of events. Any panel showing the act of creation also creates an anthropological connection to other panels that feature this.



*Figure 6: page 6 of All We Are is All We Were*

As established, the beginning comics section reveals the author as narrator and creator who fabricates the story. This panel also tells the reader that it is Jay who is in the process of writing the story, and that he wants the reader to remember that it is a fabrication by him. Furthermore, he is shown juggling letters. The process of writing is related to this difficult act, which through precision can be executed flawlessly, but for the unskilled or unlucky, can lead to a jumble of objects—or in this case letters—being scattered everywhere. This is a nod to the dedication in writing something, but also the element of luck that comes into play through the journalistic process. This is brought up by the narrator when he is going door-to-door, looking to speak with a resident who has lived in the Indian Road Area for a long time, “The majority of the doors I knock on don’t have anybody home. And even if somebody is home, there’s a chance that they don’t want to speak with me, let alone the fact that there’s still a random chance whether they may or may not be long-time residents” (71). Here, through demystification, the author acknowledges the fact that research process is based on a chance of finding sources that work. It also tells the reader that there may be sources that are omitted in the process because they aren’t important to the story.



Ethos also comes into play within this process, as the author ruminates on page 85 about issues with establishing it:

Door-to-door journalism was much easier when I worked at the *Windsor Star*.

When a fire or something police related would happen in an area, I'd knock on several doors, introduce myself as from the newspaper and ask them questions about what they've seen or know about whatever I'm writing. It was simple and it didn't matter who I was, because whatever I wrote was the voice of the paper, and they understood that. If they said no, it was usually in response to being quoted in print, and I understood that and didn't take the rejection personally.

Now, however, I always have to explain my project, who I am, why I'm interested in it. Sometimes I have to list my credentials, like being a university student. People usually question the creative writing MA, but I add in that I worked at the *Windsor Star* last year, a name they know. When people say no to me, they're saying no to this project, my writing, something I've been working on for months. Here, they're not rejecting a newspaper that I happen to work for. They're rejecting me.

This is a reflection about ethos and how it has to be established to sometimes start an interview with a source. Previously, the author had been having problems with social anxiety, which eventually led him to give up on the interviewing process. Here, the author shows the reader how not just luck of someone being home affects the research process, but that ethos and personal thoughts and feelings come into play with affecting what information can be gathered for the story. Thus, through demystification, the author

reveals how all of these come to subjectively affect what is available to build the “truth” of the story.

Intermediality is another form of reflexivity prevalent in *All We Are is All We Were*. Jones describes this form as, “the medium of representation is itself represented through another medium, thus calling attention to the particular features of each medium” (283). My work combines three different mediums: prose, photography and cartoon. The latter two appear in comic sections together. One example of this is on page 6 of the introductory comic section, where a cartoon of the narrator is followed by a photograph of him:



Figure 7: page 6 of *All We Are is All We Were*.

What this does is place two different mediums representing the same object—or in this case, person—side-by-side. As the text coinciding with the panels above indicates, the narrator wants the reader to pay attention to the fact that these are two different mediums representing the same thing and that they’re both representations of the self, to go back to McCloud’s *Treachery of Images* point.

The last form of the reflexivity that works to reveal the author’s role in crafting the text is intertextuality, which Jones writes is, “a work which is intertextual is this, by

its nature, reflexive as well, because, as the multiple texts relativize one another, they must also call attention to one another as texts” (276). Sometimes in my works texts are mentioned, such as, “Stephen Henderson, in an editorial for the *Detroit Free Press*, wrote that he’s worried that city officials’ frustration with the Moroun family prevents a possibly necessary two-bridge span across the river” (50). In mentioning the text, the narrator calls attention to the editorial being a construct, but also points out that it is used to craft my work. Here, through intertextuality, both works are shown as fabrications.

Intertextuality represents one aspect of Gérard Genette’s transtextuality, which is “all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts” (1). Here, *All We Are is All We Are* utilizes the fifth division of Genette’s transtextuality, hypertextuality, which is composed of the hypertext and the hypotext. Genette writes, “by hypertextuality I mean any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of the commentary” (5). The hypertext is a modification which depends on the original source. The hypotext is the original, the text incorporated into my work. There are several works that were used as sources for crafting the narrative in my work. Some of these include multiple articles found online from *The Windsor Star*, CBC Windsor and even CTV Windsor. I even used physical documents that weren’t mentioned in the narrative, such as the historical *The Windsor Border Region* by Ernest J. Lajeunesse. Though important sources incorporated into the work, by not mentioning these articles or the book by name, there is no intertextual relationship created for the reader because the reader is not able to create the relationship to a work

outside the book. There are, however, several references to texts that are included in the narrative, which allow a hypertextual reference to be created. For example, within chapter 6, I incorporate the majority of a document describing a lawsuit against the Canadian Transit Corporation. This becomes the hypotext, the text that is introduced into my work. When this incorporated text is mentioned in the following chapter, it creates a hypertext. “The legal document that Strosberg sent me details the location of 112 properties that were owned by the CTC in 2013 by location” (85). This is a modification of the original. Firstly, it calls upon the original mentions of the document and then places within the context of this chapter, which situates it within the premise of the narrator walking around Indian Road. It also adds more information about the hypertext, thus expanding what the reader knows of its content. Here, *All We Are is All We Were* directly mentions the work of another which is included within my work. Though the reader won’t recognize this document outside of my work—or at least, the majority of people don’t have access to it—it is incorporated within my work and creates a hypertextual relationship within itself. Both through using intertextuality of the news and transtextuality with referenced documents, my work reveals itself as a creation that is built on what textual sources I subjectively choose to include.

### **THIRD SUBJECTIVE LAYER: READER**

*All We Are is All We Are* uses reflexivity to allow the reader to see what might have subjectively affected the “truth” building process of the story. This allows the reader more

tools to make meaning from the text and judge their own sense of “truth” separate from the narrative. As Jones writes:

As a technique and a strategy of both creation and consumption, reflexivity closes the distance between the author and the audience. By laying bare the mechanisms of the production process, the author provides an avenue for the audience to make sense of what they are consuming within the context of authorship. By reading into the mechanisms of the production process, the audience creates their own avenue. (270)

Just as sources work to subjectively provide the basis for creating the story and the author subjectively takes that and pens it into a story, the reader then subjectively reads the work and creates a “truth” of story from that. Sometimes readers are not aware of their role in making meaning from a text, but *All We Are is All We Were* strives to point the reader to her or his role in creating “truth” through active reading. This is part of what the first comics chapter seeks to accomplish, using another form of reflexivity, reader awareness. Jones describes this as the reader being “made aware of his/her status as spectator/reader” (279). This first occurs on page 3 of the first comic section, where the narrator states, “Detroit, you have probably heard of.” This points at the reader and tells her or him to recall their knowledge of the city, Detroit. The reader is more directly referenced on page 6, where the narrator points out of the page—which the reader might see as directed towards her or himself—and says, “I should introduce myself.” This line indicates that the narrator is directly talking to the reader and wants to make a formality of greeting. Then the narrator introduces himself, “Hi, I’m Jay,” which the only recipient of the

speech could be the reader, as there are no characters other than the narrator in this portion of the narrative. A few panels later, after telling the reader about the difference between author and its representation, the narrator, the reader is told, “And I want you to remember all this as you read along.” Here, the reader is told to pay attention to the fact that the story is a fabrication, essentially telling the reader that reading the narrative as “truth” is up to the reader’s agency. This is further wrung home by the narrator pointing out the fact that the reader is reading “along.” The “along” tells the reader that she or he is just as responsible for creating the story as the the author is. Through reader awareness, *All We Are is All We Were* lets readers know their role in subjectively creating “truth” from a creative nonfiction work.

Each individual reads with their own means of making meaning from a text. This is important to realize because as someone reads my work or any other creative nonfiction text, the “truth” that she or he gathers from the text is different from what someone else reads. Duncan, Taylor and Stoddard write about this, “Everyone perceives the world through a unique perceptual filter, a complex web of beliefs, attitudes, and values created by culture, personal experience, and the very vocabulary with which people label experiences. Even journalists who feel a responsibility to strive for objectivity—considering the facts without being influenced by feelings or opinions—realize that absolute objectivity is an unattainable goal for humans” (155). This reveals how through the journalistic process, both the interviewee and journalist subjectively affect what “truth” is created. However, this also applies to the reader. Just as a human source subjectively perceives and tells a certain story and the journalist perceives the

telling of the story in a certain way and writes it in another, the reader makes her or his own separate meaning from the text. And this is just as subjective as the text's creation, influenced by everything that makes up the reader.

## CONCLUSION

Though Jones detailed the different forms of reflexivity and how they apply to comics, his model works just as well—if not better—to show how creative nonfiction reveals itself as a work that builds truth. When the medium of comics and the genre of creative nonfiction overlap, the fabrication of truth is made even more apparent. This occurs in *All We Are is All We Were*, a creative nonfiction text that alternates between the mediums of comics and prose. In doing so it reveals to the reader on several different levels that though it is a “true” story, that “truth” is still crafted and built not just by myself, the writer, but herself, the reader. Through reading its reflexive acts, my work becomes not just a narrative about Sandwich Towne and its struggles with Matty Moroun and urban blight, but about how journalism becomes a subjective act of writing and reading on multiple levels of creation. At its core, *All We Are is All We Were* is about answering the question, “is objective journalism real?” with the answer, “no.”

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