

Time and Place

a cultural quarterly



Ninth Floor Press

We are all of a particular time and place. The space we occupy influences who we are, what we think, how we act, re-act, and what we create. **Time and Place** is about capturing the creativity of a particular moment of the artist's life.

If you wish to contribute a piece to **TIME AND PLACE**:

There are no restrictions as to subject matter or content (the right not to accept a contribution is reserved, mind you.) Each contribution must have an accompanying paragraph detailing the significance of the time and place you were in when the piece was inspired, created, formed, birthed, or otherwise captured, along with a brief biography.

Copyright remains with the artist or writer.

Please send your submissions to ninthfloorpress@gmail.com

Contribution guidelines:

Writing: Words of any type (prose, poetry, fiction, non-fiction,) no more than 1000.

Art: Acceptable formats are PC compatible (.tif, hi-res .jpg, .pdf, 300 dpi.)

Photography: Colour, Black and White (.tif, hi-res .jpg, .pdf, 300 dpi.)

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This was drawn in 2007 in Hamilton, when I had a lot of time (and space) on my hands. This character began to ravage my brain and refused to leave.

Jen Jones has lived all over Canada, including the high Arctic, but currently resides in Hamilton. She has taught creative writing in the Continuing Education program at Mohawk College, and was awarded the City of Hamilton Artist Award 2012 as Emerging Artist in Writing. She is also a cartoonist/artist and moonlights as Batgirl when the planets align just so.

Jeff Griffiths

Mary Lou's Funeral

I dreamed that my mother was crying. I lifted my head from the pillow and heard my dad say that he had to go. I looked out my window as a police car pulled out of our driveway with Dad following in our 63 Impala, the glowing end of his cigarette spinning as he turned the steering wheel.

I opened my bedroom door. My mom was laying on the couch in the dark.

“Mom,” I whispered. She offered nothing, staring up at the water-stained ceiling. I took a step toward her.

“Mary Lou was in a car accident.” Mom closed her eyes and started to cry. “She’s dead.”

There was a plastic pill container on the end table. I put on my plaid house coat and slippers and stepped onto the porch. I was used to waiting for my dad, watching each car, looking as far down the road as possible trying to recognize his headlights. Hoping he’d make it home in one piece from the hotel.

The sky seemed brighter in the direction of the lake. I decided that everything would happen faster if I went back to bed.

Mom woke me up at eight. “Your stupid father didn’t phone so I called grandpa’s house.” She stared at her wedding ring.

“We have to go over.”

My grandparents had a colour TV and it was Saturday so cartoons were on. I watched Bullwinkle and listened to what the adults were saying. I learned that my aunt had been driving to Buffalo with two girlfriends and their car had slid into a telephone pole. Mary Lou had been killed instantly, the girl beside her was in the hospital, and the third walked away unharmed.

I didn’t go to school on Monday. Mom told me that twelve was old enough to go to the funeral. She instructed my father to take me out to buy a suit.

We ate breakfast and then dad said it was time to go.

“Come on, get with it. I’ve got a shit load of things to do today,” dad said as I tied up my running shoes.

Dad parked in front of Bill Johnson’s Men’s Wear. He ushered me up the walk to the front door that was set deep with angled display windows on each side. A mannequin of a boy about my size wearing a powder-blue sport jacket with slender black slacks stared at me with vacant eyes.

“I don’t know why your mother thinks that you have to go to this,” Dad muttered. “I’m already missing work.” He shook his head and pushed the glass door open.

Bill Johnson approached us and shook hands with my father. Bill’s grey hair was piled high like a snow capped mountain. Bill looked down to me, “And how are you young man?” He had big yellow teeth.

Dad hesitated for only a second. "Mary Lou, my sister, was killed in a car accident."

"Jesus Denny. I'm sorry. Your mom and dad okay?"

"Doin' what we have to I suppose." Dad took a breath. "So what about a monkey suit for this fella?"

Bill spent a couple of minutes asking dad about the funeral and visitation times.

After that it was as if everything was normal. I got my suit, with a discount, Bill patted dad on the shoulder and we left.

The next morning my mom was in her pajamas with her hair full of bobby pins. Dad was shaving in the bathroom. Mary Lou's funeral was at 11. I made a last effort to get out of going, suggesting I go next door to our neighbour's house.

My dad stopped shaving, his hand holding the razor in the air, the shaved section of his face looking like a snow plowed road. "You're god damned going. Now eat and get dressed."

I wanted to forget about everything. I didn't understand why my aunt had wanted to drive to Buffalo. It was a bad place; the supertime news on channel seven was always reporting bank robberies and fires on Genesee Street.

I went to the living room.

"Don't even think about turning on that T.V." My dad stood in the hall tucking in his white shirt. "I told you to get moving ten minutes ago."

I scuffed my slippers along the carpet and went to my room. My new suit was spread out on the bedspread. The jacket was beige and the slacks were dark brown. A striped tie was already knotted beside a white shirt. A new pair of socks lay on my pillow and a shining pair of shoes on the mat.

At ten-fifteen I climbed into the back seat of the car. My neck was hot and I felt like I was strangling from the stupid tie. My father drove and smoked. I was mad and wanted to find something to argue about.

The funeral home parking lot was almost full. My Dad shook hands with people on our way into the church. A thin man with slick black hair walked us to the front seats. The minister came to the front and stood between all the flowers, he had long sideburns and a mustache. He began talking about Mary Lou and god. I had expected, and was more curious than afraid, that the coffin would be in the church, but it wasn't.

The back of my heel hurt from the new shoes and both my socks had bunched up in the arch of my foot. I snuck my finger into my nose and my mother poked me in the ribs.

“Ouch,” I said louder than I needed to. A few people coughed and cleared their throats.

My mom put her mouth to my ear.

“God damn it, sit still. This will all be over soon.”

I only remember my Aunt Mary Lou's face from photographs. She was very close to my mom. She loved Elvis.

Jeff Griffiths writes, teaches, drums, and renovates in Hamilton. His short fiction has been published in various literary journals including Time and Place.

Rachael Henderson

InYerEar

In 1999, I was 19 years old. That was the year I moved from my childhood home in Puslinch aka Freelton aka Flamborough, to the heart of downtown Hamilton. 174 King Street West, Apartment 3, to be exact. I don't think my Mom was thrilled with the apartment or the location, but I thought it was perfect. I now lived in the direct vicinity of Tim Hortons, Harvest Burger and one of the best record shops of that era: In Yer Ear, run by Gord Leverton. That Christmas, my brother, Ira, gifted me his hand-me-down stereo system, complete with a proverbial cherry on top: a turntable. The DJ spark was officially lit, though it was just a warm glow as it would still be a few years before I actually got serious and learned how to DJ.

Being a regular at In Yer Ear opened up a whole new world of music, specifically Hip Hop. I was already into the standards: A Tribe Called Quest, De La Soul, Black Sheep and Pharcyde.... With the encouragement and recommendations of Gord and his staff, I began to explore underground, independent hip hop: Quannum Collective, DJ Shadow, Roots Manuva, Kid Koala, and anything and everything on the Ninja Tune label. Pretty much every Friday - payday - I would pop down to In Yer Ear, pick up a record, or sometimes three. I would spend the weekend listening to and admiring my new records, fueled by coffee, cigarettes and fantasies of becoming a badass DJ.

Here is a playlist made up of tracks from records purchased at In Yer Ear:

Midnight in a Perfect World - DJ Shadow
Bring It - The Herbaliser feat. What What
She Said - The Pharcyde
It's All the Way Live - Ultra Magnetic MC's
Golden Rule - Maroons feat. Erin Anova
Starlight - The Herbaliser feat. Roots Manuva
Top of the World - Rascalz
Concrete Schoolyard - Jurassic 5
Can I Kick It? - A Tribe Called Quest
Right On - Datbu feat. DJ Kemit
Lady Don't Tek No - Latyrx
When I Shine - The Herbaliser feat. Bahamadia
Against the World - A Tribe Called Quest
They Reminisce Over You - Pete Rock & C.L. Smooth
I Changed my Mind - Lyrics Born & The Poets of Rhythm
Be Free - Black Eyed Peas

In 2001 I moved from King Street to Locke Street and a year or two later, In Yer Ear permanently closed its doors and Gord focused on a career as an artist. Good thing there were other fine records shops to satisfy my obsession: shout out to Dr. Disc, Sonic Union and Cheapies. However, it's this particular selection of songs/records that take me back to 1999: my first year in Hamilton and the year I fell in love with records.

Inspired by a recent dinner conversation with friends about “firsts” - first jobs, first lovers, first apartments, etc., and the many different ways in which Hamiltonians are connected to one another.

Rachael Henderson aka DJ Donna Lovejoy lives and works in Hamilton. She loves her family, long distance running, good food and sweaty dance parties. Rachael and Gord continue to maintain their friendship and professional relationship through the Hamilton arts community.

donnaLovejoy.tumblr.com

Cameron Groves

House-Tower



I took this photo on the way home from buying groceries. (I can see the house from the back of my place nestled among the parking lots of the east side of downtown.) Before this I never thought about the house much, although the tower intrigued me. In my experience brutalist buildings, distinguished by raw concrete exterior cladding and (often) a top-heavy appearance, are squat rather than tower-shaped. Buildings from different points in the past, with different technologies and priorities. We are constantly walking by things that are more interesting than you would think.

Cameron Groves lives in Hamilton. He runs Gift Shop Gallery, a stone's throw from where this photo was taken.

Amy Kenny

Rosy

Mullets
in Shdden
it's tractor pull

Engines
rev loudly
as drunks rave

Someone
spilled his
beer on me

Who
cares anymore?
it's go time

Take
your seat
dig 300 feet

Business
up front
party in back

I started this poem in a different form as a joke a few years ago but then tried to come at it kind of seriously. It's probably one of my favourites now even though it's still not serious subject matter.

I grew up in Union, which is a hamlet between a small town and a village. Typical Friday nights involved drinking in out-of-the-way places - the bush, the ditch beside someone's mailbox, the treeline by the school before a dance, the train tracks behind the Elgin Mall.

Every so often though, something came along to break the monotony. The Iron Horse Festival in St. Thomas, or CALYPSO weekend in Port Stanley, or the Rosy Rhubarb Festival in Shedden. A big part of Rosy was the tractor pull, which, if you haven't had the pleasure, is exactly what it sounds like. Tractors. Pulling.

I recently read this poem at a reading in Vancouver. Afterwards, someone in the audience came up to me, all excited, because she grew up in Aylmer, near Union, and used to go to Rosy Rhubarb all the time. We laughed and talked about home and knew a lot of the same places and people. It was bizarre and awesome to find that kind of connection all the way across the country.

Amy Kenny is an arts reporter for The Hamilton Spectator. Her journalism has also been published by Walrus, Explore, Canadian Geographic and National Geographic Book Publishing. Her fiction and poetry have appeared in Room and The Antigonish Review. She is currently completing an MFA in creative writing through the University of British Columbia.

Orange McFarland

Witching Hour

There goes the neighbourhood,
Just like I knew it would when I started to see ... musicians
on the street.

It's just like royalty
Positioned like the Queens of the summer sun.

As if they're having fun
And everybody walking by
pretend that they don't know each other in the heat.

The sound of walking feet.

It's like the tallest dream.

It's exhibitionism to extremes ... and lies like you've never
seen.

And every night around the witching hour.

That's the time for me to come to power, for the hour.

Everybody in the world sings. It's a way to keep us occupied,
in case we stay alive. Even people when they scream, sing,
like Judas with an open wound, Caressing sweet perfume.

You'd likely bare your soul and keep enacting like you're in
control.

Unnerving self-patrol.

And every morning when the sun returns, that's when the novelty of song is burned, followed by a pack of hungry wolves who make you hear the same things every year, every year.

Casting secret spells.

This song is an excerpt from a modern day opera written and recorded by Orange McFarland. The opera is a treatment of Dostoyvski's *Crime and Punishment* entitled *Louse*.

Orange McFarland started out as a little salamander in Germany and made his way across the Atlantic to live and breathe in Hamilton, Ontario.

Debt

your ancestors lay by cool water.
a skin of wine was thought profane
until a gift was poured for them.

you do not wear this history
but it waits in a bright folded stripe
above your heart.

now, on Aberdeen Street,
in the bird-banishing cold,
you give me a present of goose feathers --

you, who are owed by law
the cheek of every animal,
to me, because, you said, I am a scribe --

I imagine you, frailer than your talk,
stooping in the wake
of their echoing migration.

I am sick with thanks for this,
and for every painful, sweet reversal
that drops from the wing of glory.

By Aberdeen and Cottage is Beth Jacob Synagogue. There, when the geese began their much-delayed exit this year, an older member there gave me a brown paper bag filled with the feathers they left behind. So the poem is simply from here and now.

Yonah Lavery-Yisraeli is a scribe/calligrapher who recently moved to Hamilton from Gothenburg, Sweden, but has lived in too many places to really feel “from” anywhere. Her visual art has been exhibited at the Museum of Ein Harod, the American Jewish University Gallery in L.A., and the Philadelphia Museum of Jewish Art.

Pancakes

(from what hopes to be an upcoming book “Cooking with Anger”)

Mother made pancakes every Sunday morning in our house using a recipe that never changed. She used a cast-iron pan, an old flaky iron pan handed down from her mother. I like to think that because it was mother’s mother’s pan, it could probably cook a pancake using the decades of maternal friction that no doubt had imbedded itself within the iron. Mother could pour batter on the cold cast iron and the batter would feel such scorn as to cook itself.

But that’s not how mother did it. She would put the cast iron pan on the stove burner, carefully setting the dial for either ‘stauchly tepid’ or ‘irreversibly scorching’—both of which paradoxically enough could be found by turning the dial to ‘medium’. She then made the batter by combining flour, eggs, baking powder, milk, a pinch of salt and a spoon of sugar. No doubt there was some special dab of something, a bead of sweat from her brow or the solitary tear that falls sometimes when you know your path is irrevocably set.

Mother made pancakes every Sunday from the moment my oldest brother was born until the day I moved out of the house. She measured nothing. Did it all by feel. Easily thirty years of weekly pancakes.

You would assume then that mother’s pancakes were good. They were not good.

Mother’s first pancake of every Sunday morning was consistently an abject failure; pity was extended to whatever sibling was fool enough to stumble first to the kitchen table. How do I describe the first pancake made on mother’s cast iron pan?

Imagine making a normal pancake, then giving it the keys to your car so that it could drive and crash at full speed against a neighboring tree. The burnt, oozing, dismembered thing that you would pull from the wreckage would be not unlike mother's first pancake of the morning.

The pancakes that followed were better, but not much. Overcooked, undercooked, stale, gummy, too thick, too thin. Flecked with black iron. Despite all of this, we loved pancake Sunday. In many ways mother's pancakes were flabby secular communion wafers, the transubstantiated flesh of my family's faith and history. They were flattened emblems of all of the family's tiny frustrations, and it was both a service and an honor to cover them with syrup and margarine and then devour them. The symbolic eradication of pain from the house.

I make pancakes every week for my family, and have done so now for more than a decade. I don't use mother's method, but the principle is essentially the same.

Every Saturday morning my wife Lenore wakes up, puts the kettle on, and fills a little white bowl with organic oats, premium flax and, chia seeds, and whatever unpronounceable grain she has rescued from obscurity at great expense. She makes two cups of black tea and then pours hot water into her grain bowl. This is not a bowl of ingredients; it is a hot bowl of my wife's beliefs, and I treat it as such—reverently and fearfully.

When she has done this, she takes to the Saturday paper. I then go the kitchen, reach into the refrigerator and pull out a plastic tub of what I call 'starter'.

I read a Michael Pollan book years ago which exalted the practice of cultivating fragile yeast cultures that you could use for pretentious home-made breads.

You ferment the juice of a few grapes, feed the liquid some flour, and then keep it in the fridge, feeding it week to week.

I am constantly plagued by the notion that I never made my starter properly, that I have encouraged evil bacteria into my starter, that my starter was never alive in the first place. Most notably I am plagued that I have committed myself to a bread starter at a time when everyone I know is gluten-free or on some kind of regime that includes wheat-hating. So my bread starter has therefore become my contribution to weekly pancakes. Irrational, chaotic, potentially poisonous, throbbing in a plastic tub that never gets washed-- like the bowl of weird grains, this tub is also a vessel of personality: mine

I put my wife's moist seeds into a big bowl; I add my cold sour wheat glue to it. To this I add the requisite eggs, milk, salt, sugar, baking powder, water, and single tear. Never measured, always by eye. I cook them on a cast iron skillet and/or a stainless steel pan, sometimes both at once.

They are as you would expect: odd, wild, slightly fussy, a little smug. They are unequivocally much better than you might think, and infinitely better than mother's. I have proven this by feeding them to my children's sleepover friends, who have never made the 'crazy food' face, and have always finished what they are served.

Every week I follow the same method, every week my pancakes are slightly yet noticeably different. Softer, tougher, lighter, darker, nuttier, they vary in ways that are beyond my control. They are alive and reactive to the moods of our homes in ways that I don't understand nor wish to.

I don't even know if I like pancakes. I do know that they are necessary.

9:20 am, Saturday January 30, 2016. Park Street, Hamilton, Ontario.

Tor Lukasik-Foss is a performer, visual artist and writer based in Hamilton ON.

*www.torlukasikfoss.com
iamcharlatan.blogspot.ca*

Lucky

First, I set myself
on fire. My sweater
dangled
on the gas-stove, caught
alight and flames
exploded all over
me, like I was
burning at the stake.
Luckily, the sweater
had a zipper; it came off
quickly, and luckily
I wasn't cooking with
the baby in one arm, stirring
with the other, like
I usually did.

Then, I fell down
the stairs. My
socks slipping at the very
top. I threw the baby
backwards, before I
started falling and she
landed softly, like
I knew just how
to throw a baby so
she wouldn't get
hurt. I sprained my wrist, my
ankle. But I didn't break
my neck. How lucky
is that? Maybe
that was my reward
for saving the baby.

After that, I drank more
coffee. And tried to be
more careful. When she cried
all night, I sang Bye Baby
Bunting, like an
incantation, until my
throat was raw, then
banged my own
head on the hard-wood
floor. And luckily, it
wasn't her.

My first baby never slept. So I never slept. In my fog I had many accidents. But now I look at it, I think some of my accidents might be attributed to repressed anger. That time of new parenthood is incredibly wonderful and incredibly terrible, but people forget about the terrible part, or at least, don't really like to talk about it. I think if we talked about it more, it might make it easier to bear.

Nicola Winstanley is a poet and children's book author who has lived in Hamilton for five years. Her most recent children's book is "The Pirates Bed (Tundra for Penguin Random House) and her poetry has been published in Text Mag, The Quilland, and Hamilton Arts and Letters among other journals.

Nancy Cooper

Rehab

10 o'clock on a freezing grey morning rolls around
I slide into my place on the bench with the white hairs and
kindly faces.

We all smile and nod at each other, some struggling with
laces, others smoothly and brashly accomplished at
switching their shoes.

It's warm in here, the radio station too low to hear properly,
the lights bright and the young faces of the volunteers are
unlined and sweet.

This place, surprisingly, has started to feel like a refuge
I smile and nod but I can remain anonymous - despite the
name tag around my neck announcing "*I HAVE HAD A
HEART ATTACK*", for everyone to see.

I start properly, with a gradual warm up - and, after a drink
of cold water from the fountain, climb on to my favourite
recumbent bike.

Setting the resistance and heart rate monitors I relax into
my legs pedaling and working - I say a little prayer for my
blood vessels

I can now let my mind drift to where it always drifts these
days, to my beloved friend who is dying.

I think of how she would laugh at my descriptions of some of
the characters that cycle along beside me.

She would also wonder at how that woman, with breasts the size of watermelons, could move her knees that fast.

She would make fun of me having “Joe Fresh gym clothes”

She would defend my honour when I complained that a 20 something Mac student called me “dear” and asked me “if I was going south for the winter”?

The 15 minutes of level 6 flies by- another sip of ice cold water and on to the dreaded “arm cycle”.

I usually break my silence at this machine, -it feels like torture and I look for sympathy from a fellow sufferer- sometimes I try to coordinate with an elderly Quaker I know, he is always solidly empathetic.

That's done. Treadmill next.

Back to Trines house- she stubbornly resists most help, struggles painfully up from the couch, and insists on making me a cup of tea when I pop in to say hello.

I wish I could stay all day but I'm afraid of tiring her too much. It's hard to harness my need to talk and laugh and connect with this kindred spirit of a friend.

Marching along the moving rubber with a 3 % grade and 3.9 km/hr speed, I don't focus on the flashing words that inform me, at this pace I would accomplish a slow 25-minute mile.

I pretend the ache that consumes my heart is just the exercise, it's easier to feel than the anguish that comes when I think about her slipping away.

I think about sharing a wooden sleep platform in Nepal, huddling together for warmth when I could barely breathe, due to the elevation of the Annapurna base camp. Having to go outside to pee in the coldest and most star filled night I have ever, ever experienced. Of course she was faster, warmer and wasn't short of breath, smirking gently as she got back to the plank bed more quickly than I could.

Remembering the year we spent together in Asia, drinking tea made from water buffalo milk whenever we were lost, and having countless men comment:

"your friend, - she is so beautiful".

I would nod - she was beautiful - inside and out.

Back to my treadmill, how can that person read while he is walking? I avert my eyes quickly, I don't want a perky student to talk to me. I need my own thoughts now.

I look at the clock but I don't rush, the movement feels good, and the other "turtles" are entertaining.

I almost laugh out loud when I think of the first person we worked for together, his constantly aching muscles, and droopy, needy, countenance whenever he glanced at Katrine. How did we ever survive that? I survived 'cause she was there - laughing, commiserating, supporting, generous.

I keep smiling as I remember some of the strange men she dated. None really worthy of her. We would sit out on the Hunter Street back porch, smoking cigarettes and drinking wine, talking, endlessly talking.

Despite my best efforts, one of the regulars catches me and starts chatting, he is '92 years old', 'never felt better', his movements are quick, spritely, he reminds me of a leprechaun. His age gives me hope - I don't want my children to be without me, not yet.

Winding down, I start to feel the pull to check in on Katrine, my HR increases, not with exercise now, but with the fear that she will have gotten worse since last visit, my nursing knowledge relentless in my head.

Getting into the car I think of what treat to bring, to tempt her nonexistent appetite, I stubbornly bring something sweet- sugar be damned. She will be glad to see me, welcoming, gracious, kind. She will ask about my wool or some creative project I am limping along with, unfailingly supportive and encouraging., even as she is dying

As I pull away from Weils Bakery, gooey morsel in hand, I remember first meeting Katrine at the HGH so many years ago, how we sat outside on those hot Stelco nights during our breaks, watching the activity on Barton Street, waiting for Dave to *finally* join us, drinking endless cups of coffee that tasted like smoke from the local Tim Hortons.

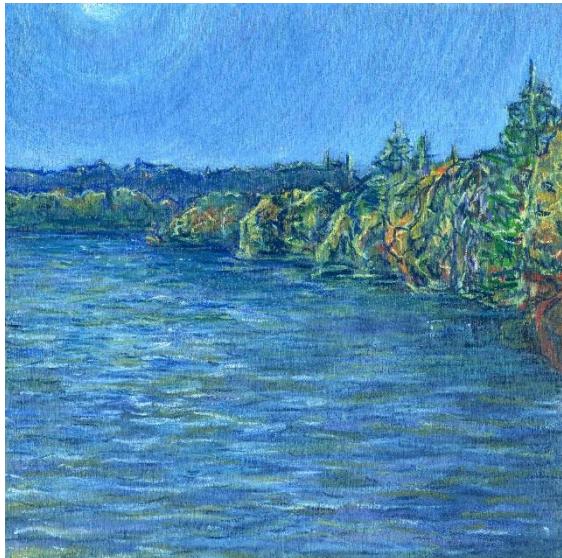
How we sat in that old green cafeteria, across from the patient coughing thru his trach tube, hatching a wild plan to travel to Asia.

I remember the joy of recognizing each other's soul from earlier lifetimes.

Cornelia Peckart and Brian Dockal

Cornelia / LaSalle Park, 2015

My past,
your fire,
and an algorithm of blue,
take us to the circle,
as water cuts the imbue,
sinking mortal parts into the arcane,
the coil steady,
he watches over and below the plain,
pushing back to shore,
across trees protecting surreptitious,
ecliptic,
incensed on capricious,
past your fire,
into true prolific.



On the Friday of the Thanksgiving weekend last October, my family gathered together to bury my Uncle Gert at the Woodlands Cemetery. He was a wonderful man and a great influence on my life. His daughter spoke about many things including his advice to her to do what you really want to do, and if it doesn't work at first, try again, find a way to make it happen, because there is always a way! I thought about this and decided that i needed to paint more because i wanted to paint more. Two days later I found a spot on the shore by Lasalle Park and painted the water and peninsula on which my Uncle and Grandmother are buried. It was very therapeutic and the beginning of a long series of landscapes. Brian Dockal, an old and dear friend, had come back into my life after 30 years apart. He promptly bought the painting for his husband. And also wrote a poem that blends his feelings about the art, his husband and integrates my story about the painting.

Cornelia Peckart graduated from the Ontario College of Art and Design in 1987 with majors in Printmaking and Installation Art. She resides in Hamilton, Ontario after stops in Toronto, Berlin, Ottawa, Pittsburgh, and Rotterdam. During her journey, Cornelia worked as an artist and educator at a number of internationally recognized art institutions, including the Andy Warhol Museum, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh and Villa Zebra in Rotterdam. She has been a teacher at the Hamilton Conservatory for the Arts for the past six years.

corneliapeckart.com

Scenes from the Wrong Side of the Bar, # 8

Living and working in a pub is like being at summer camp, except with alcohol and fruit machines. You had your friends and your frenemies. The close quarters made it hard to really dislike people. It also meant long hours, split-shifts, and the need to escape when the chance arose. We were given two days off each week. The days, however, were split over three days. We would get up, work the morning shift and, at the stroke of 2 pm, run to our room, quickly wash up and head to the train station to go ... anywhere.

Some days we would simply go into central London, have a wander round, a few pints, a good meal, a few more pints, catch the last train home, have a few more pints with the crew then head to our room.

Other days we would get up, work the morning shift and, at the stroke of 2 pm, run to our room, quickly wash up and head to the car park to greet "Milhouse": our blue "A reg" Austin Mini (purchased for a mere £500.00 from some bloke in West Molesey) which bore a striking resemblance to Milhouse Van Houten. I never quite understood the "reg" or register part ... the letter "A" indicating Milhouse was born in 1983 or London. Or both. Regardless of age or origin, Milhouse ferried us around England without fail. Except one time on the way to Rye. Who knew you had to put water in the radiator from time to time?

We travelled far and wide - easy enough to do considering the cities, towns, villages, and the like , within a few hours reach of London. One of the great beauties of the country is the juxtaposition of the size (small) to scope (vast).

We would talk about going to visit a town and (English) people would be aghast:

"What? You not driving there? Today? But it's a two hour drive ..."

But to Canadians (and Australians, to be fair though I don't often like to be fair to Australians) it was a non-issue. It was like living in a candy store being able to go and see so much history, beauty, and other pubs.

Nancy would drive like mad to wherever we had chosen to visit. Eventually, after owning Milhouse for a couple of months, she taught me how to drive standard and would sometimes let me drive. We would get to our B & B, have a wander around, a few pints, a good meal, a few more pints, before heading back to our room. Next day we would politely (or not, in my case) ignore the other patrons of the B & B while having a full English (eggs, bacon, sausage, tomatoes, mushrooms, beans, toast, and tea) then head out to enjoy the sights: sometimes castles and ruins, sometimes museums and galleries, sometimes walks on the moors to see an ancient monolith and get accosted by wild ponies, and pints: always pints.

Next day, after another full English, we would drive Milhouse back to Sunbury-on-Thames, put him to bed in the car park, head to the pub, say a quick hello to whoever was around, head to our room, quickly wash up, have a meal, start the evening shift at 5 pm and be ready to wash rinse and repeat in five days.

It was hard, it was fun, it was our life.

My wife and I went to England to help friends manage their pub, which lead to managing our own pub. I took notes. The names have been changed to protect the innocent and guilty alike.

Ed Shaw likes to write. He has published two volumes of poetry. He is slowly working on a compilation of stories about his time behind the bar of an English pub.

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