



**A newsletter for members of the York University Retirees' Association**

**Winter 2016**

**No. 34**

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### **Message from the YURA Co-Presidents**

First of all, let us begin by sending you **all best wishes for 2016**. We hope that you had a pleasant and restful holiday season, and are looking forward to what this new year will bring with a mixture of anticipation and pleasure.

**SHOWCASE:** YURA had a good fall. The highlight was the wonderful result from our communal efforts in the mounting of last November's "Showcase," our annual fund-raiser in support of student awards sponsored by

YURA. This is truly an annual community project involving a great number of volunteers led by Noel Corbett and Marilyn Cartmill. In addition to the traditional fare of our Bake Table and the sale of regiftable items at the Attic Treasures Table, we had more vendors and hobbyists than we have had for several years – truly gratifying. The result was the best in at least five years: \$1624.35, all of which will be donated to YURA-sponsored student awards. As we have said before, this is the one day of the year when we are visibly present on campus and when we publicly participate in supporting the work that the university does in the support of its students. It’s wonderful publicity for YURA and there’s even greater satisfaction in making common cause with the institution. On behalf of YURA, we want to thank most sincerely all those too numerous to mention who contributed Attic Treasures items, baked the delicious goodies, brewed the yummy jam, brought their goods for sale and their hobbies for display, helped staff the booths, and generally pitched in to make the day great for YURA and York’s students. **THANK YOU ALL.**

**Annual General Meeting:** It took place on October 23 and a new slate of Executive Committee members were either approved or renewed.

Margo Gewurtz, Cliff Jansen, Janet Rowe, and Gill Teiman retired from the board with YURA’s great thanks for their wonderful contribution to the work of the Association. We were so fortunate to have them on the Executive Committee and we look forward to their continued interest and our ongoing relationship with them. Thank you.

Four new members join the Executive Committee: Charmaine Courtis, Steve Dranitsaris, Ed Lee-Ruff and Patricia Murray. We are extremely grateful for their willingness to serve on the board and we are eager to work with them.

So we begin the New Year with a hail and farewell and, above all, with thanks for the good will and talents of such dedicated people. And we send out to you our members all good wishes for a happy and fulfilling 2016.

**-Jane Crescenzi and John Lennox**

### **WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS**

We are happy to welcome the following individuals who have joined YURA since July 1, 2015.

Paul Axelrod, Saroj Bagla, Isolde Daiski, Novelyn Dayal, John Grant, Larry Hodgins, Asher Horowitz, Stanley Kochman, Lisa Lanni, Haideh Moghissi, Diana Monteiro, Karen Pellegrino, Janice Rehner, Amy Rossiter, Mary Sangregorio, Nadia Serrentino, Savitsa Sevigny, Lynn Taylor, John Thomson, Robert Tiffin, Renate Wickens.

### **YURA Student Awards**

As you will know, YURA is the sponsor of three student awards: the William W. Small Award, the YURA Student Bursary, and our new YURA Master’s Student Award. As indicated earlier in the newsletter, all the proceeds from our annual Showcase are donated to these awards.

At our Annual General Meeting, **Kaylla Essibrah**, who convoked in June with

her Bachelor's degree in Honours History, spoke to the membership about the importance to her success of the YURA Mature Student Bursary which she held in her last year of study. Here is a copy of Kaylla's letter that she has given us permission to publish.

"As the recipient of the York University Retirees' Association Mature Student Bursary, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the tremendous support that you have provided me through this award. This award has helped me to reduce a lot of expenses I incurred during school. As a mature student and single parent, any help I receive is truly appreciated.

I am headed towards the final year of my undergraduate degree. I plan to attend law school in 2015. I would like to work as an attorney within government service, helping to inform legislation. My long-term goal is to serve as a government official.

I would like to personally thank you for investing in my future. I am a full-time student and a single parent, who is grateful for the opportunity to gain an education and fulfill my dream of attending law school. Your generosity has helped me to reduce the expenses I had while in school, and in turn deal with the stress that comes with being a full-time student and providing for my children Thank you for making a difference in our lives.  
Sincerely,"

**-Kaylla Essibrah**

### **In Memoriam**

Allen Lockerbie	September 1
Edward Parker	September 6

Keith Mills	September 13
Raymond Morris	September 30
Michael Jalland	October 4
Wilma Vivian McKee	October 8
Eileen Lucy Dawson	October 8
Cecily Bahar	October 18
Neil Freeman	October 23
Albert Lotito	October 31
Michael Haberlin	October 31
Igor Kusyszyn	November 11
Kevin Jones	November 16
Virginia Rock	November 17
Paul Herzberg	December 2

### **Life as it was back then: Reminiscences**

*Our 14th Reminiscence is written by Edelgard Mahant who taught Political Science at Glendon College until 2006, when mandatory retirement forced her to accept a part-time position. She has entitled her Reminiscence (which stems from a much larger piece and I thank her for having abbreviated it so generously), "From western Poland to the West," --- a personal memoir of World War II.*

I am a product of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. Really. In August 1939, Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union signed an agreement which divided Eastern Europe into a Soviet and a German sphere. My mother belonged to the German minority in Latvia. The Pact stipulated that Latvia, an independent country, would be absorbed into the Soviet Union, after the Germans living there were expelled and settled in the German sphere. This was ethnic cleansing before the term was invented.

My 24-year-old mother was moved to western Poland, which was taken from Poland and annexed to Germany. There were Polish people already living there, but the Nazis had a solution to that little problem. In every community the Poles were forced to crowd into one area. Their houses were assigned to the newly arrived Germans.

My mother, a teacher, worked as a tutor to the children of one of the famed Baltic barons. The Nazi authorities sent her to a village to teach. She mourned the loss of her beautiful Baltic homeland which she was never to see again. In 2011 we took her ashes to Riga and scattered them in the Baltic Sea. Riga is as beautiful as she had said it was.

The village where my mother settled had been a part of Prussia before 1919. Germans as well as Poles lived there. My father's family had moved to Poland from mountainous Bavaria, where there was not enough land for the numerous children of the Catholic Bavarians. My father was four years old when his village became a part of Poland.

When my mother arrived in the village, my father was just starting a business to sell fertilizers and farm equipment to local farmers. They married in July 1940, five months before my birth, which must have been quite a scandal. My father's family was Catholic, my mother's Lutheran. My paternal grandparents would not agree to the marriage until my mother promised to have me baptized Catholic, a promise she did not keep. Her excuse: the Nazi authorities did not approve of religious observances.

The fact that my mother and father were assigned a house that had been taken from a Polish family did not bother her. She considered those years the happiest of her life. I was born at home, with my maternal grandmother and a midwife in attendance. This makes it easy for me to answer that security question banks like: In what hospital were you born?

My father's business did well, but late in 1941, the dream of a happy married life came crashing down. My father was drafted. After the German invasion of the USSR in June 1941, the German armies devoured every able-bodied man. My father hated soldiering and did not want to give up his business to the Polish manager the government assigned him, but he had no choice. (My father had had a previous taste of soldiering when the Polish government drafted him after Germany attacked Poland in September 1939.) His second army experience lasted longer. Twice he was wounded, healed and sent back. In October 1944, his unit disappeared in eastern Hungary.

In July 2003, my husband and I drove from Budapest to Bulgaria: we stopped in Szeged in eastern Hungary. The town hall had a memorial stone embedded in the foundations. It commemorated the Hungarian partisans who liberated Szeged from the Germans, October 1944.

My mother had a second baby, who died shortly after birth, and a third, a girl in 1944. My first memory is of the winter 1942-43, when my mother and her sister-in-law decided to share our house, so as to save fuel for the war effort. I remember sitting at a table with my

cousin, the table cloth was embroidered with pictures of animals.

In January 1945, the advancing Soviet army approached our village. My mother, with two small children, four years and eight months old, had two hours to pack and leave as the German population was being evacuated. She missed the transport the German authorities provided – it was not the only bus she missed – and we ended up standing in the cold town square, my sister in a pram, two suitcases on the ground. Luckily, a retreating German army truck drove us to barracks where we spent the night. The soldiers made cream of wheat and cocoa, a rare treat in war time.

In the morning, we continued westward by train. In Frankfurt-an-der-Oder refugees were accommodated in a movie theatre; a family came and invited us to their house for the night, saying that they too might be refugees before long. The next day only a freight train was available to continue the journey. It was the infamous open train, in which many refugees froze to death. (This train is also mentioned in Modris Eksteins book *Walking since Daybreak*, which tells a similar story from a Latvian point of view.) My mother realized the danger and got off in Berlin. There she asked a woman to watch my sister and me and our two suitcases while she went to look for milk for the baby. When she returned, the woman and one of the suitcases were gone.

My mother put us in a train going West while she continued her search for milk. When she returned, the train was gone. After a frantic search, she found the train

on another track. About 30km short of our destination, the town of Northeim, the train stopped; we were sent to a refugee reception centre. I slept on a straw mattress under a table, an event I remember vividly.

In the morning, we boarded a train to Notheim. There the Red Cross was serving breakfast in the station. The room was warm and crowded. I walked ahead and came back, shouting, “Mami, I saw Opa and Oma.” My mother thought that I was out of my mind. But there they were: my grandmother, grandfather, great grandmother and auntie. What a happy reunion! In the maelstrom of refugees, many families became separated, never to see each other again.

In Northeim, we were just 20km west of the East-West German border. If we had ended up in East Germany, I would not be here today. Northeim is a medieval town which suffered relatively little damage during the many wars which razed Germany. In Grade 3, my daily path took me past the twelfth century tomb of a Holy Roman empress. My mother, who never warmed to Northeim, claimed that the Duke of Northeim’s contribution to history was to betray the emperor to his enemies. I don’t know if this is true.

Northeim did not have much space to accommodate the refugees who were streaming in from the East. We were at first assigned to a comfortable apartment, but later in 1945, the Americans converted it into a prison for Swiss men who had fought for Germany. Northeim is far from Switzerland, but

perhaps that was the idea. Our next home was a dank, cold basement.

My grandfather took me for a walk in the woods, just around the time that the Americans occupied the town. We walked past a German army office, where my grandfather gratefully accepted gifts of stationery and blotters (Does anyone remember blotters?) which the departing German soldiers were happy to give away. The town authorities had converted the local parks into allotment gardens. My grandfather took advantage of this opportunity to supplement our food supply. My grandmother, who wore her humility on her sleeve, swept up the droppings from the horses of the local farmers, and grandfather used them to fertilize the garden.

One day, in April 1945, as I watched grandfather sowing seeds, an auntie arrived and screamed out, in horror not delight, "Hitler is dead." After a few bombing sorties which forced us to shelter in the basement, the American army arrived. There are a couple of family stories that I do not remember personally. A black American soldier appeared at a basement window and shot a bullet that whizzed through the window and lodged in the wall next to where my grandmother was holding me in her arms.

Later another American soldier rifled through my grandmother's jewelry box. She, unlike my mother, had packed her things before the Soviet army was in sight! The soldier helped himself to a necklace. My grandfather took down his badge number, and an English-speaking auntie went to the barracks and

complained to the commanding officer. The soldier returned the necklace.

Under the terms of the Yalta agreement, Northeim was in the British zone, but the American presence remained. It was Americans who supplied us with school meals and food for our family. We spent six years in Northeim before we moved to Canada.

**-Edelgard Mahant (Glendon)**



Contributed by Adrienne Dome's father



## A conversation with God

Please put sound on.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch\\_popup?t=12&v=moBvLFbFdJ4](https://www.youtube.com/watch_popup?t=12&v=moBvLFbFdJ4)

-Contributed by Adrienne Dome's father

## Good Reads

*Inside the O'Briens* is a lovely novel about a family of four young adult children, including one who is married and with a new baby. The father, Joe, an Irish cop in his early 40s, learns that he has Huntington's Disease. Throughout, we follow his deterioration, his wish to be an example for his children and even grandchildren on how to live with that deadly syndrome, and how the children cope with whether or not they should learn which among them has inherited the disease and how they cope with that knowledge. It is a very well-done book, written by a neurologist, Lisa Genova. 2015 Gallery Books.

## Online article on young Japanese children

**Mary Pfister** sent the following article about young children's independence in Japan. Very interesting. It reminded me of my own childhood (minus the subway) in Montreal.

<http://www.businessinsider.com/little-kids-in-japan-are-independent-2015-10>

## Humour Department

*These glorious insults are from an era before the English language boiled down to 4-letter words.*

A Member of Parliament to Disraeli:  
"Sir, you will either die on the gallows or of some unspeakable disease."  
"That depends, Sir," said Disraeli, "whether I embrace your policies or your mistress."

"He has all the virtues I dislike and none of the vices I admire."  
- Winston Churchill

I have never killed a man, but I have read many obituaries with great pleasure."  
- Clarence Darrow.

"He has never been known to use a word that might send a reader to the dictionary."  
- William Faulkner (about Ernest Hemingway).

"Thank you for sending me a copy of your book; I'll waste no time reading it."  
- Moses Hadas.

"I didn't attend the funeral, but I sent a nice letter saying I approved of it."  
- Mark Twain.

"He has no enemies, but is intensely disliked by his friends.."  
-Oscar Wilde.

"I am enclosing two tickets to the first night of my new play; bring a friend, if you have one."  
-George Bernard Shaw to Winston Churchill.

**-contributed by Mary Pfister**

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### YURA Office Hours

Tuesday 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.  
Wednesday 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.  
Thursday 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

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The *YURA Newsletter* is published by the York University Retirees' Association.

Anne-Marie Ambert, Editor.

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