



A newsletter for members of the York University Retirees' Association (YURA)

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YURA is a member of CURAC/ARUCC, the federation of the College and University Retiree Associations of Canada/Associations de retraités dans les universités et collèges du Canada

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Message from the YURA Co-Presidents

Dear YURA members,

We hope that this message finds you easing happily into summer routines and upcoming gatherings with family and friends. The spring weather has been varied, bringing some cool wet periods but, happily, a weather-perfect Victoria Holiday weekend (in the GTA) for the unofficial beginning of summer in the Canadian context. We are delighted to report that YURA has been busy with various events and activities, and that we have planned many others to come.

Spring 2024 Events and Activities

On March 19th, YURA members enjoyed a virtual tour of the Allan I. Carswell Astronomical Observatory with its one-metre telescope, the largest telescope on a university campus in Canada. Participants appreciated the guided tour by students and Dr. Elaina Hyde's very informative "primer" on astronomical science about planets and eclipses, as well as advice and suggestions for viewing the eclipse that would occur on April 8th. For participants, it was truly a "learning" moment, one that allowed us to benefit from the expertise at a top-ranked facility at York University, in order to better understand and appreciate the eclipse event

that many journalists called a "magical moment" for North Americans in the viewing areas.

On April 23, YURA was invited to send a representative to the reception and luncheon organized by York University to honour new retirees and to thank them for their contributions to the University. YURA is especially pleased that our efforts within the joint committee (YURA and York University) have given us the opportunity to be present at such events so that we can offer our congratulations to new retirees and encourage them to join YURA and maintain a connection with York University. It has been our mission to emphasize that retirees—like alumni-- are valued members of the University community.

On June 7th, a number of YURA members planned to enjoy an afternoon "Tea and Tour" of the Ontario Legislative Assembly. The guided tour, now postponed until the Fall given uncertainty with public transit, will focus on the history, art and architecture of the historic building and conclude with an English-style afternoon tea.

Some events originally planned for the Spring did have to be postponed due to the labour disruption at the University and will now be rescheduled for the Fall. These

include the Presentation Skills Workshop for graduate students, and a proposed meet-up of Senior Scholars with faculty members who are interested in learning more about the Senior Scholar option and the type of research projects undertaken by those who have chosen to retire as Senior Scholars.

In late May, YURA was delighted that several of our members (including YURA's official delegate, co-president Steve Dranitsaris) attended the CURAC conference in Waterloo. CURAC (College and University Retiree Associations of Canada) is the national body of postsecondary retiree associations that serves as a hub for information sharing, advocacy and affinity programs for member organizations and their individual members. The upbeat theme of this year's conference was *Thriving in Retirement* and there were many exceptional presentations ranging from "Aging Well with AI", "Nutrition", "Managing Back and Joint Pain" to "Navigating Home and Community Care" and "Protecting Against Fraud and Scams". The two plenary sessions, "Thriving in Life's Next Chapter" and "Resilience in Retirement", were truly excellent. These two sessions were recorded and are well worth watching – YURA will provide links to these on the YURA website as soon they are made available to us. We also hope at a Fall YURA Café session to delve more deeply into the theme of "Resilience in Retirement".

YURA offers sincere congratulations to Fred Fletcher who was honoured at the conference with both a CURAC Tribute

award and a CURAC Appreciation award. Fred was jointly nominated for the CURAC Tribute award by YURA and ARFL (the Association of Retired Faculty and Librarians at York University). Fred has been very active within ARFL, YURA and CURAC, and has assumed important roles within each organization. He has shown strong commitment to advancing the well-being and interests of retirees at the local and national levels; he has done so with energy and goodwill and has leveraged his unique position at the crossroads of several organizations. He has been indefatigable in advocating for ARFL, YURA and CURAC and how each organization can support and strengthen the others. YURA is delighted that Fred's numerous contributions have been celebrated with these awards. (More details about the award are posted on the YURA website.)

Upcoming Events and Activities

The month of July marks another important time for YURA – this is the month when we commence **membership renewal**. In the coming weeks, you will receive information about renewing your membership. We have decided to maintain the membership fee at the modest amount of \$25 where it has been for many years. As was the case last year, renewal communications and confirmations will be sent by e-mail, thereby reducing our costs and paper use. We will of course send letters via the postal service to members for whom we do not have e-mail addresses on file. As has been our practice, we will offer a complimentary parking code for those who request this on their Renewal Form.

Complimentary parking for YURA members has historically been provided to encourage retirees to actively contribute to the life of the University through volunteer activities, research and scholarly collaboration, attending academic meetings and partaking in campus events and services. An initial code for six campus visits will be issued, and a YURA member requiring additional visits may contact the YURA Office when their initial parking code has been fully used. Members are also reminded that the YU-Card has become the official identification card for all York University members, including retirees. To obtain or renew a YU-Card, please visit <https://www.yorku.ca/yucard>.

In August, YURA has organized a **walk in the West Don River Valley leading to the beautiful Glendon campus** where a guided tour will be provided. Further details will be sent by e-mail to YURA members. Last year's summer walks provided a lovely opportunity for some light exercise, some interesting learning and some very enjoyable socializing.

With the Fall, we will see the resumption of the monthly **YURA Café** in September (details will be posted on our website) and our annual **Charity Challenge fundraising walk** in October. Again, this year, YURA's fundraising efforts will focus on alleviating student food insecurity on campus. More details will follow in a timely manner.

A very important date to enter on your calendar is that of our Fall **Annual General Meeting on November 1st**. YURA is thrilled

to announce that our guest speaker at the event will be Dr. Glen Jones, a globally recognized scholar in the field of Higher Education. He is Professor of Higher Education in the Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education, and former Dean of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. He is a renowned public speaker and commentator on higher education issues. (Please see the YURA website for more details about our guest speaker.) The YURA Executive has decided that our AGM will once again be a hybrid event as was the case last year. This format allows those in the GTA to attend in person to hear Dr. Jones' presentation, participate in the Q & A session, and have lunch and socialize with other YURA members, and then attend the AGM. At the same time, the hybrid format allows all those who are at a distance or unable to come to campus to hear Dr. Jones and to participate in our AGM. However, the hybrid format is an expensive option, and we will be asking YURA members who attend in person for a voluntary nominal contribution to defray the costs of the luncheon. YURA will assume the costs related to the technical support because this crucial support allows us to make the guest speaker's presentation and our AGM available to all YURA members.

Thank you, Anne-Marie

Finally, it is with deep appreciation that we acknowledge the tremendous contribution Anne-Marie Ambert has made to YURA over many years, as editor of the *Newsletter*

EDITORIAL FAREWELL

and the *Person-to-Person* bulletin. Anne-Marie's début as editor was with Issue #19 in Winter 2012; her final one will be this issue of Summer 2024. That amounts to 49 issues over 13 years! Soon after becoming editor, she introduced the *Person-to-Person* bulletin to supplement the *Newsletter* so that YURA members could more informally exchange experiences, opinions, and information about retirement-related issues, as well as make personal contributions such as cartoons, jokes, and travel memories. Countless issues of the PTP have been published during Anne-Marie's time as editor; we all remember the number of these that she sent out through those long months of isolation during the pandemic! We are hugely indebted to her for her service to YURA and to all York University retirees. It is entirely fitting that she was honoured with a CURAC Tribute Award in 2022. Although stepping aside as editor, Anne-Marie hopes to continue as a contributor to the *YURA Newsletter*.

It gives us great pleasure to announce that Steve Glassman and Richard Weisman will be collaborating on the Newsletter starting with the Fall 2024 issue. We look forward to working with them and we thank them for their interest in taking on this role.

To all YURA members, we wish good health and a summer of enjoyable activities that will create pleasant memories.

Diane Beelen Woody and Steve Dranitsaris, YURA Co-Presidents

In 2010, I wrote to the then YURA co-presidents, Sandra Pyke and Janet Rowe, to tell them that, in the future, if there was ever a vacancy, I would be happy to be considered for the editorship of the *YURA Newsletter*. To my astonishment, they immediately replied "You're on!" But I hesitated because I did not know that, at the time, the very able editor, Irina Ostapchuck, had resigned --I did not want to push her out, so I replied to the two co-presidents "not so fast, ladies!" And of course, they were not amused...

I am now retiring from this position as YURA's editor. This summer issue of the *Newsletter* is number 67. The first Newsletter I edited was number 19, which was the Winter 2012 issue. I had, the previous year, started the *PTPs*.

Despite the fact that I would have liked to involve more of our members in the writing, especially for the *PTP*, I must say that I have very much enjoyed being the editor. It is a role that I have assumed for most of my adult life under various formats--scholarly journals, publishing houses, women's groups, and others.

So, whatever the difficulties at times involved, I have continued to enjoy and be stimulated by the position and by those YURA members who have collaborated and to whom I am so grateful. I am particularly grateful to all of the devoted and personable co-presidents, with whom I have worked throughout all of those years, beginning with Janet Rowe and Sandra Pyke, John Lennox

and Jane Crescenzi, Charmaine Courtis and Ian Greene, and more recently, Diane Beelen Woody and Steve Dranitsaris.

I am particularly indebted to John Lennox who has so elegantly and generously copy-edited and corrected my French twists for all of these years. John, thank you so much for your good humoured-patience.

The computer work required for this position has become too much for my eyes. I must say, however, that I would have had to resign a couple of years earlier had it not been for the help of my little cell phone into which I was able to dictate all of my articles and notes and then use it to make corrections. Unfortunately, this little technological "marvel" does not have enough brains to understand my French accent and too many of the dictated transcriptions are terribly hideous, or hilarious, and others practically pornographic so that, by the end, I couldn't cope with that either! I am not sure what AI would do with that! Perhaps worse.

I will miss this last editorship of my lifetime and, particularly, the YURA environment and the many relationships involved.--
Anne-Marie Ambert

LIFE AS IT WAS BACK THEN

Our 46th Life as it Was Back Then is that of Newton Gurdyal. When he retired in 2007, Newton, who was a member of YUSA, worked in the Petrie Building where he

built equipment that professors used for their experiments.

I was born in British Guiana in 1947, the youngest of 5 children. My sister Selena was the eldest and then there were my three brothers, all two years apart, Winston, Kenneth and Eustace followed by myself Newton. I don't know when my dad's ancestors arrived in Guiana but presumably my grandfather, or great grandfather, travelled there from India as part of the indentureship program. I also have no idea where his "Britishness" came from. My grandmother on my father's side was Amerindian. I never met any of my grandparents, but my father had two sisters, one a school teacher that lived near us and the other lived in Berbice. I only recall visiting her in Berbice once because it was a great distance from our home.

My father George spent a great deal of time in his youth in the Guiana rainforest with that part of the family as he told us many tales of his time there. One sticks in my mind, when he sat to rest on what he thought was a tree stump, until it moved, and it became obvious that it was an anaconda. He knew a great deal about the healing capacity of plants and when, in my childhood, I suffered an accident and the doctor wanted to amputate my arm he was adamant in his refusal to let that happen. He collected plants from the wild, made a poultice, and saved my arm.

My father was a Christian but wasn't an actively religious person and never took us to church. I have no idea how my father became Christian, how he was named George (presumably after King George V) or why my siblings all had English names.

I know even less about my mother Dukhni. She was Hindu and occasionally I would accompany her to the temple. Every year I would make the clay pots with her for holding the Diwali lights. She did have sisters and I hated to visit them as they would massage coconut oil in my hair.

The British Guiana I knew was paradise on earth. Clearly at some point in time my father had money and whether he acquired that from panning for gold in the rainforest, I do not know. We lived on a 10-acre farm and my father grew pineapples, cassava, yam, eddoes, oranges, mangos, papaya, guava, coconuts and bananas. There were aloe vera plants and fever grass for tea and we had some chickens. The house we lived in was quite large but back then there was no electricity, so my mother cooked over a wooden flame on a stove made of dried dung and the house was lit in the night by candles. There was no running water; we had a rain barrel outside or took water from the canal. For a shower we had a cabin and would gather water in a bucket that had a rope attached. The rope went over a pole and you then pulled on the rope, so the bucket overturned.

Being so close to the equator we didn't have daylight saving time, sunrise was always around 6 a.m. and sunset was around 6 p.m. There was no television, but we had a battery powered radio with antennae and would listen to the BBC overseas broadcast on the weekend. Of course, Guiana was a land of sugar and canals were built from the Demerara River to the sugar estates so that the sugar could be transported to port. To supplement his income my father would sometimes work on the Bookers Sugar

Estate, cleaning the trenches so that the barges could pass through with the sugar.

We lived on the West Bank of the Demerara River, by Canal #1 and that is where my brothers taught me to swim, using a leaf from a banana tree to float. We fashioned bats from tree branches and played cricket. The school I attended, L'Aventure Government School, is still there today. At school I excelled and was a head prefect, giving me access to the headmaster. I graduated from that school in 1962. My favourite place to study was to climb up in a mango tree and there I read Shakespeare and dreamed of one day going to university in the UK as there were none in Guiana.

On the rare occasion that we would cross the river and visit the capital, Georgetown, we would see people smartly dressed; men in terylene suits and women in smart dresses. The only place to shop back then was at the Stabroek Market in Georgetown.

The houses from the bank of the river along the canal were occupied by people of Indian descent up to our house and from our house onwards the houses were occupied by people of African descent. My friends were mainly from the African side as they were the ones who had more freedom to play sports and kids don't see race anyway. After school we would often meet at the bridge that crossed the canal, jump in the canal and swim home.

Around the age of 11 my life took quite a turn. My mother became ill and went to live with my sister who was now married and could better care for her. She lived in East Coast Demerara and we were not able to visit often because of the distance from

home. My two eldest brothers had finished school by then and began working at the Bookers Estate, Winston as an office clerk and Kenneth as a cane cutter. Now I was left at home with my dad and my best friend, Eustace. There was no free medical care or education in Guiana and as the costs built up, my father had to sell the farm to pay the bills. We moved into my sister's much smaller property across the canal which was vacant following her untimely death. Her son Alvin had been living with us following her death but by now he had also left. I would often sit and watch the new owners of our home across the river and remember our time there.

The Bookers Sugar Estate had their own school and were looking for the brightest students to attend there and attempt to pass the College of Preceptors Exam in one year, a programme normally completed in three years. I was selected and provided with a scholarship. Indeed, in June 1963 at age 16 I passed that examination, the equivalent of a BA I am told. Sadly, while I awaited the results, my mother passed away, so she never knew that I had been successful. She was only 49 years of age.

We had no money and there was no way for me to further my education, but I was then accepted by the Guyana Sugar Corporation, which was formerly the Booker's Sugar Estate, into their 5-year Engineering Apprenticeship Programme. I was sent to various sugar estates around the country, all owned by Bookers. It is there that I was instructed by mainly British Engineers, the best in the world, and in 1968 I became a Certified Toolmaker. It was a long five years though as I was rebellious; this was

not what I wanted to do. Added to my discontent was the death of my best friend, my brother Eustace, who passed away from a brain aneurism on June 6, 1965 after playing a game of cricket. He was only 20 years old. I was away in another part of Guiana at the time and was informed by an instructor. I travelled home unaccompanied to attend his funeral. The grief was overwhelming.

By then Guiana was changing, and not for the better. In 1961, the country became self-governing except with respect to defence and overseas issues. Between 1961 and 1964 there were race riots and strikes by workers and British soldiers were sent to calm the violence. People who had been my friends from early childhood were now people I had to hide from. In 1963, shortly after my mother's death, my sister had to flee her home as her house was burnt to the ground by rioters. I recall visiting her at her new home, under tarpaulin in a mud patch.

On the 26th May 1966 British Guiana was granted independence from the UK and became Guyana. With support from the US, Forbes Burnham became the leader of the country and, while he solidified his position as a dictator by 1968, expelled any British left in the country. Many of our instructors at the training institute were given a week to leave the country and lesser qualified people replaced them. As food and supplies became scarce the paradise I grew up in deteriorated and now, aged 21, I began researching where I could go and how I could leave. We had learnt about the Commonwealth in geography class, so my options were the UK, Australia, New Zealand or Canada. I decided that Canada

was the place for me and began the long process of applying to emigrate and saving money for my airfare. A potential issue for Canada Immigration was that I had no bank account and I had to explain that we dealt in cash, there were no local banks, only those in Georgetown, and I kept my money under my mattress.

My certification as a toolmaker, as much as it was not something I ever wanted to be, was a great asset in this process. It was not until we reached the airport that my father understood I was going for good and he wished me well, happy to see me take full advantage of the opportunities that had been provided to me. I never saw him again. On June 6, 1971 I arrived in Toronto, a landed immigrant and, to this day, know that I made the right choice. -- **Newton Gurdyal**

HOW DOES NORTH KOREA OBTAIN ITS FOREIGN CURRENCY DESPITE SANCTIONS?

North Korea is generally known as one of the poorest countries in the world and, in the 1990s, during the succession from the father to his son, Kim Jong Un, there was a famine during which between 1 and 2 million people died. Until that time, North Korea had been able to supply its people with some basic food but somehow the "supply chain" broke down, especially in the countryside where people were already more than poor. And this is where most of the deaths occurred, especially among children.

After that, the population slowly realized at the individual level that it had to fend for itself and a black market as well as the exchange or barter of essentials secretly emerged. Since then, these markets have become more or less regulated. Also, North Korea shares a very long border with China, some of which is not even well guarded, so there is quite a flow of condiments between the two countries which did help the North Koreans and also later became a source of foreign currency for the regime. And one should add here that North Korea is one of the most repressive regimes in the world, and the one in which the population is the most socially isolated from the rest of the world.

Despite the poverty of its population, the capital of Pyongyang is a rather beautiful city full of high- and mid-rises in which two to four million people live. These comprise the elite, that is those who work in all of the big industries, agencies, and the banking system, including what is called The Bureau 39. This is the hidden bank of the great leader Kim Jong-un. Districts within the capital even have shopping malls, sports arenas, excellent schools where, among others, online scammers and cyber attackers, are trained and constitute a substantial proportion of the fraud and the disruption happening around the world in various key institutions and enterprises. The rest of the population living outside the capital needs a written permission in order to enter the city.

As we know, North Korea now has illicit nuclear weapons and is very close to reaching the point of being able to send

ballistic missiles with a nuclear power tip across the world, especially aiming at the United States. So how is such a poor country able to make the necessary money especially knowing how Kim Jung Un is fond of French wine, champagne, Cognac and fashion, as well as owning a large fleet of Mercedes, despite all the economic and political sanctions against this country? And how does Kim get the necessary foreign currency?

Exporting labourers. To begin with, he uses a great portion of his population as essentially slave labour within the country itself and in other countries such as China where it is said that he has approximately 100,000 of his countrymen working, and also in Africa, Cambodia, Russia, Mongolia, the Gulf States, and even Syria. And, surprisingly enough, in Poland where the programme investigators were able to interview secretly one of the construction workers who felt that he had had no choice but to go leave North Korea to work to support his wife and his daughter. (For these workers, running away would result in their families being thrown in concentration camps.)

What happens to these workers is that, after toiling days of 12 hours, they are transported by bus back to their barracks for the night and are closely watched. They get some food and token money for their family when they return to their country. But 95% of their salaries are paid directly to North Korea.

Printing foreign currencies. Another way to earn foreign currency, especially

American money, is to print false American dollars. For instance, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, fake money is hidden within regular American bank notes, brought to a bank and deposited, then withdrawn in the currency of the country in question, which is then wired to North Korea. But more often, it is brought in diplomatic pouches throughout the world back to North Korea. North Korea has several embassies, including in Europe. For instance, the North Korean Embassy in Berlin is used as some sort of a hostel in which tourists live and it procures at least 3 million a year in Euros. The Germans have tried to do something about it, but after all, it is an Embassy and enjoys immunity.

In Cambodia, right at the entrance of the famous ancient Angkor Wat temples which are now visited by over 2 million tourists a year, the North Koreans have installed a very beautiful Museum where people have to pay for entering and where one finds a North Korean restaurant with beautiful women servers dressed in traditional North Korean outfits. At the end of a traditional meal, the same women give a show. There are apparently over 100 such restaurants across the world, yet another source of foreign currency. The women servers are never allowed to go anywhere else and live on the floor above the restaurant and leave only when it is their turn to return to North Korea after many years of slavery.

Exports. Coal and textiles are the main exports from North Korea, although there are sanctions against them. First, North Korea produces silk of good quality and

quantity from which luxury garments can be made and sent to China. Second, as mentioned earlier, it builds what amounts to slave factories both within the country and in China where clothes are made, even for fashionable Western brand names. These are labeled "Made in China," so that the brands that import them believe that this is the correct label. Many of these brands have inspectors who go to China and look at the quality of the production and the quality of life of the workers. But once they are gone, the industry receives clothes made in North Korea. Of course, given the current situation in the world, North Korea is supplying Russia with weapons against Ukraine for much-needed currency and food. And before that, we may recall those horrible documentaries in the news of what was happening to the democratic movements in Syria where Russian planes were bombing the city of Aleppo, for instance, and using poison gas that killed insurgents in a horrible fashion, especially children. The metallic components of these gas canisters had been made in North Korea. They had been transported to Syria via ships flying flags from other countries and going through the Suez Canal. The Americans were able to capture one such ship and this is where they found the material that was then assembled in Syria as part of the effort to destroy Assad's enemies. It should be noted that Kim Yung's father had been a great friend of the current Assad's father: dictators tend to support each other's. (The documentary was presented on French TV 5 on Wednesday

evening, January 25th, 2024.)—**Anne-Marie Ambert**

HEART WITH WINGS

December 29, 2023 was the day we said goodbye to our dear, sweet little dog Sofie. She was a part of our family for nearly 14 years and the love and comfort she gave to all she met was immeasurable.

We all have such heartening memories and remember the laughter her antics brought us, such as when she ate the realtor's Gucci shoes, dug for clams in PEI, slid across our pool. More than the fun she brought us was her empathy. She could sense a person's need and brought such comfort to all our family through the toughest of times, through heart surgery, anxiety, fertility treatments and catastrophic loss. Whenever you saw Sofie she would greet you with such enthusiasm. She helped grown men overcome their fear of dogs just by her love and understanding. She could be so tough when she sensed danger and then so gentle around youngsters. She was curious and loved adventure. Sofie was a Juggle, a mixed breed dog, part Jack Russell, part Pug and part Beagle and she displayed the very best of each of those breeds. She was actually our daughter's dog but spent her days with us for her first four years when our daughter was working long hours. I am not sure who cared for whom. My husband had retired due to poor health and she was his rehab, making him walk every day.

They became the closest of friends and whenever we saw her, she would always go to him first and insist on sitting on his lap.

On her last Christmas morning, Sofie opened her gifts with her usual enthusiasm and she knew exactly the spot to sit under the table to ensure the greatest supply of turkey. But she clearly was not well; her hind legs kept failing her. The veterinarian thought she had dislocated something and when that medication did not work, it was thought a middle ear infection was the issue but Sofie continued to deteriorate. She had a fear of the vet's office and the thought of taking her there for her final moments was unbearable. That's when our vet told us about Heart with Wings, an amazing service for pets and their owners.

They were contacted and, after a long discussion about Sofie's health, they came to her home to assess the situation. We went there also to say our goodbyes and when Sofie saw her best friend her tail wagged one last time and then she started to whimper. It was as if she was asking to be let go, knowing it was her time. The vet and her assistant brought with them a colouring story book explaining death in simple terms for Sofie's young friend, our grandson, and also bubbles for him to blow, to send his love and wishes to her in the sky. Confirming our worst fears, Sofie was sedated and laid on the bed, her favourite place for afternoon naps and we were able to snuggle with her one last time, comfort her and say our goodbyes. When she was finally in a deep sleep, medication was administered and she passed away in our

arms, at peace, with no fear. **Patricia Gurdyal**

STRANGE BUT TRUE



Prior to 1920, it was possible to send children through the US Postal service. However, there were certain conditions that needed to be met. Firstly, the children had to weigh less than 50 pounds, and stamps were attached to their clothing as a form of payment. It was often more cost-effective for individuals to send their children via mail rather than opting for train transportation. During the journey, the children would travel on a train, specifically in the mail car, where they were supervised and provided with nourishment by mail clerks. One remarkable example of this unconventional practice involved a distance of over 700 miles, from Florida to Virginia, covered with a mere 15 cents worth of stamps. (Contributed by **Vivienne Monty**)

YURA Executive

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Anne-Marie Ambert, Editor
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