



*INNER  
CITY  
BEAT*



# Foreword

The inner city is littered with metaphor. So much writing has painted the place with imagery of broken still-beating hearts, church steeples against a backdrop of high rising corporate power, bleak and cold unwelcoming concrete, needle-fraught alleys, or an urbane phoenix rising from the trash. And so the inner city is this place, in so many minds and in so many cities.

Thankfully, this stereotype only runs so deep. There is a sense of despair in the visible poverty that permeates our core neighbourhoods. But that's just outside looking in. I've spent years working and living in this place, and like a timeless friendship it continues to unfold, endearing like a smile teased from rough around the edges.

If anything, the inner city is human. Possibly the most human place on earth. Where there is suffering, there is redemption. Where those damp in spirit still fire with great light. Where the worst that could happen reshapes surroundings into triumph and survival. Where helping others is not charity; rather, it is the good life.

Efforts to revitalize and gentrify the inner city work to hide and erase unpleasant truth. But as long as humanity still has a pulse, its artists and writers will reflect the truth, pretty or grimy, back to society so just maybe we get a gist. Word on the street is poetry transcends the bricks and mortar of civilization.

In 2016, local poets unearthed the sounds, characters, and themes of inner city for an Edmonton Poetry Festival *Bring Your Own Venue* reading at Zocalo in McCauley. Inside this chapbook are professional and aspiring poets alike who bring a vital voice to the humans of our central neighbourhoods. Inside these pages there are the fresh throbbing rhythms, hard knocks, and divine hammers of Edmonton's *Inner City Beat*.

**DAVID PRODAN**



# List of Poems

- A.M. IN THE 'HOOD** • Paula Eve Kirman
- COMMON THREAD** • Ky Perraun
- CHURCH STREET** • Leif Gregersen
- INNER CITY LITTER** • Gary Garrison
- ELEPHANT** • Pierrette Requier
- HARD TIMES** • ML Williamson
- INNER CITY; MOTION** • Keri Breckenridge
- HIGH RISE WINDOW WASHERS** • Marco Melfi
- THE MAN IN THE GLASS** • Gary Garrison
- STAN** • Patricia Whiting
- MEMORIAL MARCH** • Paula Eve Kirman
- THE SEWER WALKERS** • Marco Melfi
- BROWN ARMS** • Ky Perraun
- GIRL** • Pierrette Requier
- BLESS YOU** • Ky Perraun
- KILL TIME** • Jae Jae
- DREAMS FOR EACH OTHER** • Max Vandersteen
- INSTRUCTIONS TO MYSELF, LEARNING ABOUT WHITE PRIVILEGE** • Naomi McIlwraith
- KINISTINO AVENUE (A.K.A 96 STREET)** • Gary Garrison
- NIGHT SHIFTS / NOT YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD** • Hans Cully
- NIFLHEIM** • Alice Major
- LINING UP TO BE SERVED AT A THANKSGIVING DINNER** • Jill Lang
- SHARPS** • Hanna Garvey
- RHONDA** • Patricia Whiting
- LIFE IN THE INNER CITY** • Chris Leclair

## **A.M. IN THE 'HOOD**

Early morning chirping of sparrows drowned out by the screams of magpies while sirens declare their mission down 95 Street as commuters slow down or pull over.

The familiar face of the statue in the park maintains its eerie glow between the tables and the trees that have grown to tower over the playground and create a local skyline of branches and leaves.

I stroll down the sidewalk on my way to caffeinated awakenings, passing bus stops and shelters; houses and cyclists; other pedestrians – we nod as we pass and give faint smiles and occasionally say hello, even if we are strangers.

These streets, these trees and sounds unite us: at this moment, later, tonight, and the next day. It is a bond of geography and circumstances and love.

The magpies and sirens grow quiet as I sip my latte and move along to my next appointment.

**PAULA EVE KIRMAN**

## COMMON THREAD (THANKS TO G.H.)

Blemish on the perfect white face of G-d,  
blight to small business and weekend reprieve,  
terrified by internal demons, our man  
camps on river banks, prey to frost  
and angry young gangs.

Shopping cart stuffed with nylon tent,  
ragged blanket, stained foam mattress,  
the vagabond panhandles coins on Specialty Street,  
hunger-creased face hollow, harsh wind  
piercing thin, dusty jacket.

Shoppers, sightseers, in trendy fashions  
and good taste pass by, oblivious.

Class valedictorian, most likely to succeed,  
he heeds invisible warnings, written on walls  
in blood and excrement, dines in dumpsters,  
free food poison to his alien blood.

Hunted on the asphalt safari, fleeing syringe  
and straitjacket, refusing aid and shelter,  
our duty, our shame, our brother

reminds us of our humanity,  
the common thread binding well to ill.

Do not turn away, I pray, alleviate his agony  
as you would do  
for one you love  
as you would bend  
towards your itinerant apostles  
who eschewed all manner of sustenance  
not freely given

oh citizen, Oh Christian, oh kin.

**KY PERRAUN**

# CHURCH STREET

Hundreds of homeless people, cold and gathered in one place  
A tired and somber look cast upon each face  
They scavenge through the day for change and cans  
The winter cold and wind with numb feet and hands

How can we live with so much wealth in this city  
And so few people ever show the homeless any pity  
They find them and arrest them for vagrancy on Whyte  
Dump them off on Church Street all hours of the night

I don't wonder why these people often turn to booze  
Most of them have no other joys, nothing to lose  
I often feel so useless trying to help a little here and there  
When a million people sleep safe and warm and don't seem to care

You can't forget that these people are mostly sick  
But getting homeless people help they need is a trick  
Mentally and physically a lot of them are dying  
And their families have long ago stopped trying

So if you have it in you I ask that you kneel down and pray  
Ask your Creator to give you strength for just one more day  
Time and strength enough to help one body and one mind  
The Spirit that loves everyone will give you love for being kind

When you give of yourself it frees you and then  
What you give will also come back again  
When you are gone no one will care how much money you made  
It will only matter to those behind how much of yourself you gave

Look deep inside you now and think hard on this  
Do you remember your first dollar or your first kiss?  
Love is what the Higher Power above asks that we all give  
Give all you can to those who need it and then you will truly live

**LEIF GREGERSEN**



## INNER CITY LITTER

This shred of plastic lid  
left by the side of the asphalt path  
warmed somebody's lips,  
held heat in a cardboard cup  
that somebody nestled in both hands  
as he sipped steaming hot caffeine,  
his back hunched against the wind  
while he walked to an office tower downtown.

The cup is nowhere near, blown away  
like a migrant seeking shelter  
against cold, brick churches,  
locked up six days a week  
to keep their crucifixes warm.

**GARY GARRISON**

# ELEPHANT

Because the elephant  
in the room  
wouldn't leave  
She finally laid  
her head against  
its wide flank  
its great grey weight  
Blessed the ponderousness  
until it left swaying  
with the cadence  
of its plodding grace

He'd said the other  
was a better fit  
And she shocked  
and not prone  
to making fits  
nevertheless  
did something  
befitting of the  
situation

Perfect jeans  
she thought  
To hold tight  
the wild woe  
in the bone marrow  
And a sharp knife  
to clean the grit of gone  
let sorrow do its work  
slice a new path  
She now walks the knife-edge

**PIERRETTE REQUIER**

# HARD TIMES

They tell me she's the brain and he is the heart.

Annie and Herb – yah I made up those names.

It is not quite nine on an already hot morning.

“Hard times” she says sipping vodka from the mauve plastic stemware that matches her skimpy top.

Lime sunglasses match her chipped nail polish.

“Just stopped to smoke a joint” (that is not part of the hard times).

“I love her” he says, jamming his right arm into his leg to still the tremor.

“The stress of the move broke us up but we are getting together again.”

She looks less certain as she probes the thick jagged scar running the length of her collarbone.

“You gotta find a place where your friends don't know the address.  
Gotta keep it a secret this time.”

“I'm too good a friend.”

When I ask she says “No names, no address”

While at the same time, he blurts out their names and adds:  
“Looking for a place but not around here.”

And I can't help thinking,  
more hard times ahead.

**ML WILLIAMSON**



## INNER CITY; MOTION

I fly through the wave of angles  
that make up these inner city streets  
I fly through the sound of traffic  
that helps us to keep the beat

I dreamt this avenue was a river  
its currents swept round my grounded feet  
I dreamt its water flowed through me  
and it helped me to keep my beat

My heart sang to the boulevard trees  
and now they know my name  
My wind sang through their leaves  
and now we are the same

Sunlight spotted sidewalks  
trace my inner (city) journey  
Just come across this river  
and reverberate with me

**KERI BRECKENRIDGE**

# HIGH RISE WINDOW WASHERS

Harnessed in matching bosuns  
and buckets of foamy soap  
beside them,  
high rise window washers swing,  
suspended by cords  
that dangle limp liana like  
along the beams that frame  
the office glass they wash.

It's a daredevil's desire  
for height. The high  
of being held airborne  
without rush to come down -- yet Icarus  
rarely admits this as vocation.  
But Narcissus knows his partner,  
trusts the reflections of delight  
when Icarus rappels  
carefree with ease  
between floors.

Narcissus isn't shy  
to boast. For him  
it's a labour of love  
to chamois clear his own image  
daily in the aqua tinted mirrors  
of these skyscrapers.  
It's self indulgent  
but he's meticulous  
with smudges of birds, bugs  
and soot that hasn't blown off.

The inner city's a backdrop  
as workmates hang,  
from towers downtown,  
squeegee clean each pane  
and pass time with stories  
of their youthful myths.

**MARCO MELFI**

# THE MAN IN THE GLASS

10 o'clock Sunday night. November.  
Ta tappa ta tap, tappa ta tap tap  
on the hundred-year-old oak front door.  
The man upstairs puts down his book.  
Nobody else is home. He wonders.  
The neighbours sometimes snort coke  
in the alley, mainline smack, leave needles  
in the weeds by the garbage can,  
turn tricks on a mildewed mattress  
stashed in a derelict Chevy van,  
deal drugs, carry knives, curse, shake fists,  
shout death threats over chainlink fences,  
like volleys in a game of terror tennis.  
In this same block last September  
they found a broken body in a dumpster.

Ta tappa ta tap, tappa ta tap tap.  
The winter wind whistles  
against his bedroom window.  
He shivers. Puts on robe and slippers.  
Dashes down the steps and squints.

Through the beveled-glass oval  
he sees a Rembrandt-like tableau  
in blacks, dark grays and greens.  
A spruce towers to the left.  
Its longest branch across the sidewalk  
six feet up shudders in the breeze.  
One olive-green Honda at the curb,  
bull's-eyed windshield, dented door.  
Snowflakes dance like goosedown  
around the yellow streetlight,

swirl and settle on the grass.

On the porch a shadow whimpers.  
"Will you help mmmme pppplease?  
My jjjjacket's gone. My shirt is ttorn.  
My fffriend tttook all my mmmoney."

In the backlit scene the stream of blood  
that dribbles off the shadow's chin is black,  
the gap between his upper teeth a clot.  
One arm hangs sleeveless, bleeding  
at the elbow below a blue tattoo:  
two serpents coiled around a skull.

The inside man bites his lip. He thinks,  
"His hand could shatter this glass,  
break my jaw, steal my wallet."  
"Wait there," he says, goes up, comes down  
and hands him out a blanket.

The police respond to his nine one one,  
hustle the shadow into their cruiser.  
An officer comes to the door to apologize.  
As he leaves, he covers the bloodstains  
on the porch with a handful of dirt.

The next day, on the way to work,  
a man steps out onto the porch.  
The rising sun glistens  
on new-fallen crystal.  
The sky is bright and blue.

**GARY GARRISON**

## STAN

Stringy brown hair whipping back from an ochre face of peaks and angles,  
*ê-kî-ohpwêstikwâniwâsiyan tâpiskôc pîminahwânisa ê-kî-osâwinâkwaniyiki êkwa*  
*ê-kî-atisonâkosiyân.*

you rode the swings standing straight up, cigarette glued to your lower lip.  
*ê-kî-nîpawiyân kâ-wêwêpisoyân, ê-kî-pihtwâyan.*

Knees of your Levis ripped decades before it was cool,  
*ê-kî-sîpîhkotâsêyan ê-kî-tâtopayit pâmwayês ispîhci miywâpîsinâniwîw.*

you turned wooden seat and chains into a launch pad  
*mistikotêhtapiwîw êkwa pîwâpîskwêyâpiya kitâpacihtân isi ita mâna kâhohpîhk*

that allowed you to soar above us all, then land

*kâ-pimihâyan ispimihk kahkiyaw niyanân, ê-nihcohpiyan*

on dirty leather shoes, untied.

*ê-wîpâtakîhk ê-pahkêkonohki maskisîna namôya ê-kî-sâkâpitaman.*

Colorful curses, same ones you painted on the clubhouse wall

*ê-kî-wiyâkwêyan, êkoni ê-kî-masinipêhikêyan mêtawêwikamikohk*

were spewed off rhythmically to our delight,

*tâpiskôc ê-miyo-ihwakwak kahkiyaw ê-kî-pâhpiskiyâhk.*

punctuated by a jet stream of spittle expelled

*tâpiskôc wâpîski-pahkitêwâpoy ohci pimihâkanîhk*

to distances - incredible, glorious distances

*ê-kî-sôhki-sîhkoyân wâ-wâhyaw*

from between clenched teeth.

*ohci tastawic ê-kî-kipwâki kîpita*

Even the street hockey boys in their over-sized jerseys,

*wâwâc nâpêsisak aniki kâ-sônîskwâtahikêcik opapakîwayânihk ê-mâmîsâyiki*

try as they would,

*ê-kocihtâcik*

couldn't replicate a feat like that.

*mâka namôya ê-kî-kwayask-itôtahkîk tâpiskôc.*

Your posse, a smattering of kids from homes that didn't smell

*kitiyînimak, awâsisak ohci mîkiwâma namôya ê-kî-isimâkosîcîk*

of sheep cheese and sauerkraut,

*mâyahtîko-âpakosîsi-mîciwîw ohci êkwa otêhipak ê-sîwâk,*

adjusted to your every move like metal filings in a dime store game.

*ê-nâspîtotâskîk tâpiskôc kîkwây kâ-h-akopayik*



Plucked one by one from your seduction by a parent's trill,  
*ê-yikatênikocik ê-kî-têpwâtikocik onîkihikomâwiniyiwa.*  
they reluctantly left you  
*osk-âyak kî-sâkwêyimowak kâ-nakatiskik*  
solo  
*ê-pêyakoyan*  
on the bleachers or the curb.  
*ê-kî-âpiyan têhtapiwinihk âhpo mocihk sisonê mêskanâsihk*

Night threw down its gauntlet.  
*wanitipiskâw ê-kî-wâpanacâhk wêhk*  
You countered.  
*ê-kî-mawinêhwat ê-kîsi-tipiskâk.*

Squashed the stub of a stolen smoke beneath your heel,  
*ê-astawêskawat kiciscêmâsin kimahkwanihk*

hunched the shoulders of your corduroy jacket, and chin down  
*kî-kipwahpitên kiskotâkây êkwa ê-kî-nawakiskwêyiyan*  
made your way across the deserted school yard.  
*ê-h-akwaskohtëyan isi kiskinwahamâtowitahkoskêwinihk*

The dark parted for you.  
*ê-wî-ati-wâpak*

Somewhere,  
*nânitaw*  
a lone rock ricocheted over rough asphalt.  
*pêyak asiniy kî-kwâskwêpayikawat pâsci asiniwipayihcikanihk*

Despite what we learned in Art class,  
*âhci kahkiyaw ê-kî-kiskinwahamâkosiyâhk anita kâ-sisopêkahikêyâhk*  
you never grew smaller in the distance.  
*namôya wihkâc ê-namatêyan.*

**PATRICIA WHITING**

*Translated into Plains Cree by Naomi McIlwraith and Dorothy Thunder*

## MEMORIAL MARCH

This is my annual Valentine's Day tradition,  
Gathering in a church, called to order by  
Drums and songs and smudge.

Marshals don their vests and  
We take to the street

Marching for those missing and murdered  
Marching so they are not forgotten

Through the years I have met  
Mothers, sisters, brothers, aunts  
Daughters, nieces  
All bound by their grief

We sing and drum and chant  
We return to the church for stew and bannock,  
For stories of those departed  
To the spirit world  
Where one day we all  
Will be reunited.

**PAULA EVE KIRMAN**

## THE SEWER WALKERS

Technicians in fluorescent vests  
reverse periscope our inner city  
of utilities. They listen into manholes  
for a pair of men sent to test for the end of life  
of pipes -- water mains  
made of asbestos or cast iron  
being assessed for future salvation.  
It's underworld renewal. Upgrades  
to the abyss beneath the pavement  
we take for granted. Like Dante, Virgil,  
the pair descend in masks, air packs, headlamps  
and wade into cylinders of sewage  
akin to Acheron, the silence  
broken by the intermittent blow of their horns  
to reassure the vested on earth.

**MARCO MELFI**

*Source: "New job posting ranks among most terrifying in Edmonton"*

*Edmonton Journal - January 4th 2016*



## **BROWN ARMS**

Purple scars on blue veins in brown arms,  
arms outstretched to catch you as you fall from castle  
windows of grandiose delusions. Beads and methadone,  
stone Buddha into which lean the classics – The Analects,  
The Dhamapadda. A small room, institutionally neat,  
where she lies, goosebumps and shiver, retch and mumble.  
Pretensions pool in the puddle of vomit at the bottom  
of the bedside pail.

Oxygen mask of neuroleptics, umbilical cord tethering  
you to the system. You are not the messiah. You can only  
save yourself. Powwow gratitude, peyote visions point you  
towards home. You leave, brown arms waving as you pull  
onto the long road, destined for a life measured in dosages,  
clinic visits and the god damned struggle to stay sane.

Brown arms stay behind, fashion amulets, spread like wings  
before the final fold across the breast.

Today brown arms reached out for silver. Somehow you found  
yourself refusing. No longer street generous, no longer one  
of the hungry, you turn away. Brown arm ends in an extended  
finger, or a one-handed clap-. You do not look to see.

**KY PERRAUN**

# GIRL

Third girl  
Slept in the middle  
Of the other two  
Always older  
By decades it seemed  
Of another generation.  
Their maturity  
Like the heaviness  
Of housework  
As orderly as  
Piles of office work  
As sharp as paper cuts.

How long is a girl a girl

They believed in concrete  
In practical in down to earth.  
She lived on the thin edge of their  
Almost not lived girlhood.  
Never fully children  
They bore children.

How long is a girl a girl

Some girls lose girl  
Voluntarily  
Some forcibly  
Some never.  
Some find her again  
In disease  
When falling apart  
In love.

How long is a girl a girl

About friends  
Always hesitant  
As a spotted fawn  
Camouflaged  
Blending in with  
Tall grasses  
Falling leaves  
The pungent odour  
Of humus.

She always knew she  
Could only  
Be come  
Elsewhere

The space and the wind  
And the skies  
Anything vastly open  
Were to be  
Companions

Being a girl was not named  
Being a girl was not something

Not being  
someone

Yourself

How long is a girl a girl

Being a girl  
Was having already  
Been promised.

For this girl  
Escape

Words in the wind  
And the skies  
Anything vastly open

How long is a girl a girl

## PIERRETTE REQUIER

*Edmonton's 6th Poet Laureate, child of la grande prairie canadienne, is a bilingual poet, playwright, performer, producer and mentor. Although her work constantly brings her to new places, her pieces come from some deep core of home in her, a rising up of words, of a rhythm, through the ears, like a heartbeat; a surging, like the August wind in the leaves.*

## BLESS YOU

Kindness and compassion in the face  
of adversity and dire poverty abound  
in shelters and room and board homes  
where those whose minds are rendered inconsolable  
meet with victims of abuse and refugees of war.

With Indian sisters I broke bread  
shared cigarettes and solace.  
AIDS victims lent ears and arms  
as my racing thoughts and sleeplessness  
left me incapable of coherent interaction.  
Alzheimer's patients provided employment  
and those who took vows of poverty  
paid my passage to cloisters.

Names and dates are inextricably linked  
with phantasms and internal chaos.  
I can neither recall nor locate  
those who eased my passage.  
Some indeed have departed  
their generosity and wisdom unsung

but I live on and am grateful  
for the ragged and ravaged  
benefactors I have known.

**KY PERRAUN**

*Previously published in Issue 51 of The Prairie Journal of Canadian Literature*

# KILL TIME

Don't feel da love @home that's why we turn 2 the streetz/ where if u show weakness the only thing u deserve iz defeat//

Death playz a person 4 keepz/ trying 2 kill time but fear time will soon kill me in theze murderous weekz//

On da streetz we raize hell cuz hell raized us/ no help from police n 4 most of us programz n jail ain't enuf//

Watched people,, sold cokaine/ just fo a,, gold rope chain/ showz, how people can grow, but they fa sho don't change//

They like damn dude/ I don't undastand u/ 4get servin fast food/ u needa get it in gear, come out here n trap2//

N it appeared that wuz tru/ thought I had nuthin 2 loze/ but that changez see/ just met a crackhead same age as me//

I see I'm out late in streets/ n while I'm playin playstation 3/ he out seekin 4 a place 2 sleep//

Ain't got a thang 2 eat/ n if hiz lil sister, don't turn trix then, they ain't gettin paid this week//

Itz plain 2 see/ though I know not supposed 2 judge a book by the cover/ but daddyz a dead beat n just look @ their mother//



A dead beat junkie, a crook they discovered/ it was just the 2 of them so they've  
always stood by each otha//

Off the chainz no 1 can put a,, leash on my mind/ always real talk never,, dis-  
crete wit da rhymezz//

A wize man once told me homie if u,, seek u will find/ so every nite I'm in the  
streetz with the gleam of,, cream in my eyes//

I remember them jail dayz but nuthin was,, long as the nitez/ so many,, songz I  
would write/ of copz harming me n,, wronging my rightz//

Just don't kno what's goin on in my life/ itz like I can't go nowhere without  
startin a fite//

No,, place 2 hide/ cant,, say goodbye/ have done, enough, bad to,, make satin  
cry//

Im an,, asshole/ going for the,, fast goal/so I,, can't slow/ cuz once the,, cash flow/  
well, u know how,, that go//

Have a belt on but the,, stack of dough/ plus the gat makez my pantz,, sag low//

No I don't get 200 evrytime I,, pass go/ I,, have no/chance so/ I keep landing  
back in jail which is a,, hassle//

Now I ride with,, nobody @ my side/ Lord I'm askin why/ everything I love,,  
always has 2 die//

Yea we,, laugh n cry/ but that's just 2,, pass the time/ only, going, forward, fast, n,,  
can't rewind//

**JAE JAE**

# DREAMS FOR EACH OTHER

The ideas that I get at night  
make it seem easy to put things right;  
everything's dreamy 'til awakening in morning  
to face it - why can I only  
dream of the courage that I'd bleed  
dream with the courage that I need

to face why people don't react  
the way that I dreamed they would,  
the way that I dream they should,  
or do I act the way they dream I could,  
or should there be any difference between  
the way either of us picture the act

whether in fact or in fantasy  
would we, could we, why don't we  
dream the same dreams of each other,  
dream the same dreams for each other,  
live the same dreams with each other  
or live the same lives as our dreams.

**MAX VANDERSTEEN**

# INSTRUCTIONS TO MYSELF, LEARNING ABOUT WHITE PRIVILEGE

First, it's a theory: don't take it personally,  
but recognize the personal power of racism  
even if you are white and especially if  
your white skin affords you privileges  
you are only now recognizing.

Second, you must be peaceful and listen carefully.  
*kiyâmêwisi êkwa nanahihtaw*

Third, speak just as carefully as you listen.  
Listen with all of your humility  
and all of your sincerity  
and all of your curiosity.  
*tapahtêyimiso êkwa tâpwê êkwa kiskinowâpahkê*

Fourth, you must make peace with yourself  
again and again and again and again.

*nêwâw, wânaskê*  
*kâ-kihtwâm êkwa kâ-kihtwâm*

**NAOMI MCILWRAITH**

# KINISTINO AVENUE (A.K.A 96 STREET)

Go down 96 Street to 1912  
when all our roads had names.  
Go to Grace Methodist on Sutherland Street.  
Catch the city's first streetcar in 1908.  
Stand at Ross and Kinistino before World War I:  
one French, one English Catholic church tête-à-tête.

Stroll 96 Street now. Count all the churches.  
Count the kids at the rink, the soup line patrons,  
the languages, the skin tones, the greetings from locals,  
the years since Treaty 6 and the street's Cree name.

**GARY GARRISON**

*Kinistino is pronounced Kin-iss-tin-awe, with the accent on the second syllable.*

*Gary recently published Human on the Inside: Unlocking the Truth about Canada's Prisons.*

*This poem was a winner in the Edmonton Poetry Festival's 2015 Poems on the Bus contest  
and was posted on many ETS buses and LRT cars for several months.*



# NIGHT SHIFTS / NOT YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

Fixated on the few blocks centred around WEAC (Women's Emergency Accommodation Centre), the majority of the selected photos were taken between 2008-2010 on the way to or from work, late in the evening and early in the morning.

A number of the buildings captured in the Boyle Street neighbourhood are gone / transformed. Other buildings will change soon, too, or least the landscape will. Either way, the composition will never be the same. WEAC, the flat iron, that perfect slice of pie on Jasper and 96st, once the big boss on the block, is now dwarfed in comparison to the great Iceberg next door.

\* \*

Every night at 3am, mopping the floors of WEAC, with seventy-six women, half of them resting, the other half restlessly meandering throughout the hallways and smoking in their windows, we watch the "night shift" across the Ave.

25 Cent Peeps, open 24/7, in blinking lights with sun-bleached sex toys and mags on display. Fancy cars pulling up, stealth, not from around here; consuming.

Just west of the Peeps, men and women huddle together under blankets for warmth.

"Do I make eye contact with her?" "What will happen if I don't give him my change?" "Will someone walk you to your car?" "Is it safe to get off the bus here?"

Safety for whom? The power hasn't shifted nearly as much as you feel it has.

The Peeps isn't there anymore, it's a shell now. The great Iceberg has landed across the way. An indicator of change: a sign of the first things to go. Big change is going to happen.

\* \* \*

"There's nothing for me in this neighbourhood, why would I come here?" But there IS something here for certain people, for those who consume, but mainly for those who can't leave and keep returning.

It's not dead here, there are pockets of life and activity. You weren't really looking in the first place.

“See you at the Tree” “Meet me at The Hughes”

\* \* \* \*

Learning to print in the darkroom, and coming back to these Boyle Street series, because something captured has already changed. Repeatedly revisiting it. And it's only the beginning.

Like trying to revive it.

\* \* \* \* \*

Every photo is different. Perhaps the photos aren't great, the composition might not be there, but the attempt is a clean crisp image, aesthetically appealing to the eye. And it's an excessive amount of work to get to this place. Are we applying this to the neighbourhood?

[Let's make this a place \*people\* want to come to!]

The parallels in the darkroom: Is it symbolic of her “healing” journey?

The Process

Great effort, small success. At times back to the very beginning, or maybe worse off. Mistakes and changing variables. Hours upon hours, (days upon years) to get to this (important) place.

\* \* \* \* \*

Photos were taken with an analogue toy camera, a limiting process, avoiding the digital, in 120mm film. Photos were repetitively hand-processed, a few dipped in wine, and overall a lot of water was consumed.

\* \* \* \* \* \*

7 ½ years ago I came to this block for work.

I thrive at night. This is what I see. My heart is in this neighbourhood.

**HANS CULLY**

*Excerpt from Water, Wine, 120 mm Film Photographs*

# NIFLHEIM

This is a statue to the memory of  
the unremembered,  
homeless ones who die  
(thirty, forty  
of them) every year in this one city.  
Thirty or forty  
names carved only on the air by frost's  
fleeting glitter.

A slumped bronze figure sits  
by a closed door.  
Through the door frame's metal rim, we see  
no light, no fire.

The door that opens for those who die  
without a home  
is the door to Niflheim, the realm  
for those cut down  
by age or sickness, a land of mists  
and misery,  
locked behind Hel's heavy gates.  
(‘Old’ means fifty  
in the inner city. Disease as prevalent  
as winter weather.)

Around the arch of this memorial  
square tiles of clay  
record the thoughts of those who know  
what ‘homeless’ means.  
Spare some change, in raised block letters  
carved by one  
who knows how little change occurs.  
Another winks



No diving beside a sketched dumpster –  
thumbing the nose  
at authority's directives. A heart  
has Hope inscribed  
on its rounded surface, sheltered  
in curving palms.

Even the homeless memorial  
found it hard  
to find a home. No, not on the civic  
squares and plazas,  
declared authority. No space in front  
of city hall.  
We do not like to think of Niflheim.

So here it sits  
in the realm of old railway yards  
and redevelopment.  
No cleared pathway to approach it by.  
Surrounding snow  
collapsed to hardness. On this  
January day  
it's like walking on a choppy sea  
modelled in hard  
glazed pottery by hurried hands.

Heroes earn  
the warrior's end, Valhalla. They cross  
the rainbow bridge  
to feast and plenty. But those who die  
of sadness  
reach Nifelheim across a shore of corpses,  
and their battles  
against the giants go un-named,  
unrecorded.

**ALICE MAJOR**

*Also published in Standard Candles, University of Alberta Press*



# SHARPS

Recent imaginations seem  
To arouse connected images-  
A needle  
Not the homely type,  
The type of past terrors  
As ridiculous as it seems, I know.

A puncture  
Perhaps blood-  
That would be nice.  
I always hated the feeling, though  
Inconsolable  
As it scraped at the bone  
As I felt my most inner workings  
Scream  
It seemed necessary to voice what they could not.

Why is it that I always sit and dream  
Of these sharp, cold scenarios?  
What is so fascinating about those edges?  
Speaking of which, there are no more pencil sharpeners in  
this house.  
The precautions  
I would never, no worries  
Never scheme of such worries.

One day I wish to dream  
about porcelain dolls, or pillow cases.

**HANNA GARVEY**

# LINING UP TO BE SERVED AT A THANKSGIVING DINNER

You see them all there  
Handbags stuffed, nails polished  
Standing in a line  
Keep your head bowed and lower  
Because help comes with a price

Deemed as deserving?  
But who is more deserving  
Smile to pay the price  
Because that's the way it works  
You only get what you deserve

Judge and jury there  
Their world is seen black and white  
Little second thought  
No help for the undeserving  
Whose world is viewed in grey

We're not separate  
Hearts beat in the same rhythm  
Only luck and chance  
Decides what side of the table  
Did they get what they deserve?

You be the judge now  
You can't see their black and white  
All one shade of grey  
If only they could see it  
All the same beat and rhythm

**JILL LANG**

## RHONDA

She had penciled a star beneath one eye  
though she hardly needed to.  
I can see it still.  
Head tilted slightly, almond eyes squinting  
to see through her own reflection in the pane.  
Lee Anne home?

I leaned back from Gilligan's Island  
and caught a sliver of her beauty in the hallway  
as she shouldered the weight of the door.  
Bold, my mom would say, how bold.  
Ebony locks dangle freely, obscuring Mickey Mouse  
as white threads dripped from denim cut offs,  
fringed the top of a tanned leg; a perfect exclamation mark  
that ended in a blue suede Adidas runner tapping  
our stoop. Tossed me a Double Bubble (only one that did)  
from a small, brown wrinkled bag.  
Tell her we're in the field.  
Slight jerk of the head acknowledged a heavy,  
heavily made up girl behind her I hadn't noticed.

High school was a monster to swallow up a kid like that.

Spit back out a desperate pile  
of sallow, scabby skin and visible bones.  
Bold?  
Still bold.  
From the Whitby jail she was interviewed  
and argued for the rights of whores.  
Although dulled by the black and whiteness  
of The Times,  
the thick lens of the camera caught the flare  
of a distant star.

**PATRICIA WHITING**

# LIFE IN THE INNER CITY

As you live in the inner city waking up to  
sun shining on your face

Long days, lonely nights

People rushing about nowhere to go  
Cats wandering the streets at night  
Dogs barking most of the night

People screaming through the night  
People asking for cigarettes or  
Can you spare some change

Long line ups for supper at the Mustard Seed  
Heading to the Bissell for a coffee, two, or three

People hanging out all about in the inner city

Graffiti on the walls  
Winds blowing garbage back and forth  
Down the streets

Just another day in the inner city

**CHRIS LECLAIR**



**INNER CITY BEAT IS A  
PROJECT PARTNERSHIP  
SUPPORTED BY**



**PHOTOS BY**  
PAULA EVE KIRMAN

**PRINTED BY**  
BLACK CAT PRESS

**THIS PUBLICATION IS MEANT  
FOR FREE DISTRIBUTION ONLY**

**© 2017**