

## Something of a contradiction

By Anthony Carnovale

Toronto: I was born in the city; I was raised in the city. I make it a point to return as often as I can. When people ask why I visit so often, I tell them: I need to keep my senses sharp. They laugh. They snicker. They don't understand. You see- I need Toronto to help with my craft. I navigate the city like I do an empty page: I'm not always sure where to start; I just need to begin and the stories will find me.

I'm most fascinated by the contradictions that are so prolific and pronounced in the city. Sometimes they feel like an assault on my senses. The old. The new. The rich. The poor. The fast. The slow. The pedestrian. The driver. Life. Death. The hipster. Everybody else. I can walk a single block and see the potential for a dozen different stories. For me, life exists inside these contradictions; my writing is what helps me make sense of it all. The writer Georges Bataille once said, "I believe that truth has only one face: that of violent contradiction."

The contradictions that I love about Toronto are also here in Orangeville. There are the rich; the poor; the weak. Like every town, there are the powerbrokers - their portraits hang on the donor wall at the Orangeville hospital. I see some of these same faces around town. They talk politics, news and compare aches, pains and bruises like kids at recess. They travel in packs from art shows to museum exhibits to author events and are regularly featured in our local media.

Orangeville has a younger demographic than the Ontario average, but you couldn't tell from all the denture clinics, health clinics and plays written and performed for the 50+ crowd. Orangeville is a town perpetually celebrating its past at the expense of its future. There aren't many things for a teenager to do in this town. The youth of Orangeville are restless. You can see them in the library on Saturday afternoons. You can see them lounging at the corner of Broadway and Mill Street. As every teacher will tell you, a bored kid is an anxious kid. I've heard that there is a tenuous relationship between the police and Orangeville youth. There seems to be an inordinate number of young girls pushing strollers around town. A few years ago the town sanctioned a graffiti wall, which tells you just how much the town knows about graffiti culture.

The more I walk, the more I hear. I've heard about overdoses and suicides; I've heard stories about shady landlords; somebody told me that prostitutes used to meet their johns in a local café; someone told me about a street of swingers, that "when they leave the red light on in front of their house, they're looking to swing." When we first moved here, we received a gift basket from the town's welcoming committee. I heard a story about a brick being thrown through a resident's window because they had welcomed Syrian refugees into the community. There is little diversity in this town. In fact, I think the reason why some people have moved here from Brampton and Mississauga is for that very reason (somebody had to say it). I see Canadian flags hanging proudly; at one time a Confederate flag hung in a window along Broadway.

Now, I know people will tell me that I'm misinformed, that as an outsider I don't understand the town. A couple of years ago, I rented a truck so that I could take some items to the dump. While waiting for the paperwork, the attendant asked me if I was local. "Yeah, I've lived here for?"

"You're not local unless you've been born here, sir!?"

I may not be local, but I am now a part of this community - my son goes to school here, my daughter plays soccer here, my wife spends our retirement savings at Starbucks.

I once interviewed a local senior. He lived on Elizabeth Street for the better part of his life and now resides in the senior residence at the east end of Elizabeth Street. What does it mean to be local? To live and die on the same street?

For me, there is no "history" here; I haven't been here long enough. I don't have an allegiance to the past, nor do I feel the need to have to celebrate it. Time is not static. We need to stop thinking that it is. Change. Is. Coming.

Visit the market on Saturday morning and see the people who have come from elsewhere and who now call Orangeville home. It is the people that have come from elsewhere that will push this town in the direction it needs to grow, whether they're from Toronto, Brampton or Syria. We can only learn about ourselves by learning about, and from, others - people who will contradict, challenge, and contribute to a new, more inclusive narrative for this town.

We need to hear from the young and the new. We need to think about building more community spaces so that people can come together for something more than ribs, jazz and waterslides. What does the town do to promote diversity? Judging by the ethnic make-up of council and committees, not much.

Writing is like walking; sometimes you get lost. If I do, I'll try to find my way back - or not. Luther once wrote, "Not knowing where you are going is the true knowledge." In writing this column, my goal is to put myself out there, observe, engage, challenge, contradict myself, reflect and share. As a local writer, my first step is to take everything I know about this place and blow it to bits.

The second step: to pick up all the pieces and see what I can make of it.