



AN ARTS AND HUMANITIES STUDENTS' COUNCIL PUBLICATION

# SPOTLIGHT

VOLUME SIX



# **VOLUME 6**

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# ABOUT SPOTLIGHT

Spotlight was founded to respond to the age-old question, “What do you do with an Arts & Humanities degree?”

Now in its sixth edition, Spotlight pairs students and Western Arts grads for an inspiring conversation on the value of an Arts & Humanities degree, the Western experience, and the various paths each alum has taken to reach their chosen career.

More than offering a series of roadmaps to any number of career options, these interviews encourage Arts students to be open to whatever the workforce might have in store for them and to take advantage of opportunities. Spotlight is about connection and those values which we share as an Arts & Humanities community.



## LETTER FROM THE DEAN

This most recent issue of Spotlight – the 6th such collaboration between current students and alumni – is not just about showcasing the variety of genuinely interesting careers that have come from an Arts and Humanities education at Western. Nor is it about giving current students the chance to flex their interviewing and writing skills. Rather, this issue of Spotlight illustrates how communities are absolutely central to our experience, and the range of ways students and alumni can engage and contribute to the communities in which they find themselves. These interviews demonstrate that empathy, imagination and a desire for practical change, in service to the betterment of humanity, are often the hallmarks of an Arts and Humanities graduate. I am extremely proud of all those students and alumni who volunteer their time and talents to make a difference in the world. Their example powerfully demonstrates that anything is possible with an Arts and Humanities degree.

My term as Dean will end in June 2023. It has been an immense privilege to work with students and alumni over the past 12 years. I have shared alumni stories with students (and their parents!) with pride and delight. I will never stop advocating for the ways an education in the Arts and Humanities can lead to meaningful careers, marked by purpose and personal fulfilment.

**Michael Milde**

Dean of Arts and Humanities



## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The beauty of Spotlight has always been its ability to showcase a range of career paths and any number of degree combinations. Ostensibly, it has always been about giving current Arts students an idea of where their degree might take them. It has been about proving to suspicious relatives that, yes, you can get a job with a Visual Arts degree, or having studied Philosophy. But really, Spotlight is about more than that. This year, our alumni spoke about the profound effects their Arts and Humanities degrees had on them as people, and not just as workers. They spoke about curiosity and community. They spoke about being eager to learn and being open to new opportunities. This year, the sentiment was clear: it's not about where your degree gets you, but what you get from your degree.

As has often been the case, our interview team this year perfectly embodies those values most championed by our alumni. Over twelve interviews, our team of nine has consistently demonstrated a willingness to learn from their alums, and a desire to explore the various sectors that past Arts students have chosen as their communities. They have embodied that Arts-specific drive to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them and learn that something new which could open the whole world for them. I am grateful to both our interviewers and our alumni for being so ready to reflect on what it is to be an Arts and Humanities student, and the sheer value of an Arts degree.

As I read this year's stories, I can't help but think of what a huge role Spotlight has played in my own A&H journey. In my last year as editor, I must thank Francesca DeNoble (now an Arts alumna herself!) who recommended I apply for this role two years ago. I also must thank Jessica Schagerl, our project supervisor in the Dean's Office, who I have had the pleasure of working with and learning from over the past two years. This role has had a most profound impact on me, and I hope that our readers are just as affected as I am by the stories they find in Volume 6.

# OTHERWORLDLY ART

SARAH FORTAIS

BY MICHELLE SADORSKY

Fifty-two group exhibitions. Seven solo exhibitions. Sixteen performances. Teacher, panelist, and lecturer. Now the first Artist-in-Residence for the Centre for Outer Space Studies at the University College London. Meet Sarah Fortais, a 2011 Western graduate currently residing in England. With a PhD in Fine Art and a staggeringly impressive CV under her belt, she has made a name for herself in the art world with her research-based practice in *bricolage*— the act of disassembling and repurposing familiar objects and redefining their value.

Fortais's work consists of a unique blend between the sciences and the arts; she leads research-based experiments to create art made from everyday objects. "I built—this was for my Masters—a Apollo A5L pressure suit out of garbage that I was collecting in London, so it was a part-for-part copy of a functional suit."

So, how did this fusion of science and art come about? Fortais was always deeply interested in the sciences, having originally enrolled in Western to pursue Biomedical Science with the intent of entering into the plastic surgery field. Yet she also took a first-year art course to help round out her average, which she soon found out to be quite enjoyable: "Having the flexibility to have improvisational experiments appealed to me in the arts." One of her first experiments involved a photography project, where she cut up giant strips of her photographs and froze them into panels, suspending them in the Labatt Visual Arts Centre, where they would disintegrate and fall apart. "I remember my professor took me aside after this and said, 'You should really consider art as your profession.'"

There were two professors in particular who positively impacted her art journey whilst attending Western: Kelly Jazvac and Paul Walde. "Jazvac taught me the basics of casting, and I really enjoyed the different projects she had, like sculpture" Fortais shares. "I remember taking a sculpture performance course and was really cringing about the performance half of the year. But it turned out I ended up really enjoying it because I didn't realize that the process



of making things could be a performance in itself." To this day, Fortais keeps in touch with Jazvac, but also Walde, as he sometimes travels to the UK. From her days in Western, Fortais still remembers some of the most profound points Walde made to her and her peers. "He came into class and said that everyone comes to his office hours and asks how they can get a better grade," she recalls, "but they never ask me how they could be better artists." She adds, "As a teacher myself, I feel that."

Fortais has fond memories of her early days at Western—from the craziness of frosh week to the shenanigans that took place at her residence in Saugeen-Maitland Hall, to working on an ice photography installation that she believes probably wouldn't have happened at another university. "There was a Student Levy fund available at Western, so I was able to get a freezer and keep it on campus to make my ice works, which was wild." She was also a member of the Visual Arts Supporters Association (VASA), where she helped plan events with fellow Arts students and held small exhibitions, eventually becoming the club's President. She also worked at the university's Woodshop as a Technician on the evenings and weekends, learning about health and safety approvals for art pieces from the Head Technician, Doug. She recalls one instance where Doug was putting together the metal sculpture that sits at the base of UC Hill. "When he was building the sculpture, he convinced everyone that it

was safe by getting the entire Western football team to hang from it and try and take it down. That was almost the ‘official okay’ that it was structurally sound.”

One of her most invaluable experiences came from her practicum, a final year course she had to apply for. To Fortais, that practicum course—which primarily focused on working towards a final exhibition—was good preparation for her eventual Arts education in the UK. After consulting with professors and researching the artists that she admired, such as the YBAs (aka the Young British Artists, or Britart), she found that the artists she wanted to emulate were all located in England. Further, she took a Summer leadership course through the Kinesiology department, through which she was able to travel to Paris and visit London, just to see if it was as amazing as she thought it would be. And it was.

“Western really helped me find out where I wanted to go after school,” Fortais notes. She eventually settled on completing her MFA at the University of the Arts London, where she would go on to meet many artists that she admired in real life.

One of her greatest accomplishments to date has been her work on the Donor Wall, a long-term project where she created casts of hands to be added to the wall as benefactors joined the university community, which would only be complete after the 100th hand was installed. With this project, she was able to meet a variety of people and learn their motivations for becoming a benefactor. “I cast the hand of the second person in the UK to receive eye injections. They were legally blind before these injections, and after therapy treatment they were able to get their driver’s license back. They’re all just fascinating people.” The most rewarding part, she believes, was when the project was unveiled to the public, and she was able to see how much this work meant to the people involved. “By the time we unveiled the project, there were a few people whose hands I had cast who had passed away,” she shares. “So, getting to connect with the families and see how much it meant to have these people immortalized felt like a big accomplishment.”

Fortais also participated in the first UK Mars analog mission, created by the Space Health Research company, where she spent a week living in simulated

outer space conditions. The mission took place on an uninhabited island in rural Scotland, where she and the research team looked into remote field care and how astronauts could respond to potential medical incidents during the course of their mission. Since then, she has joined the company as their Artist-in-Residence, and is preparing for the next analog, scheduled for this summer. Fortais is also looking forward to another analog mission in Poland—the first lunar simulation comprised entirely of women from minority backgrounds—and exhibiting the art made from her previous analog mission.

Fortais encourages students in the Arts to really enjoy their breadth requirement courses and use those experiences to inform their artistic practices. As for creating art, Fortais believes that “the way you do things is going to be your own unique brand.” As she thinks back to her Western experience, she is grateful the space and time to develop and explore, kickstarting her journey into the art world.



## AUTHOR REFLECTION

What really stuck out in my conversation with Sarah is how she was able to so seamlessly intertwine sciences and the arts, and be a part of the first ever UK Mars Analog mission and so many other research-led initiatives. When she discussed the projects she’s done in the UK, I couldn’t help but want to visit London myself, just to see the Animals in Spacesuits and other creative projects she’s made since graduating from Western. Sarah has such confidence when she discusses her art and her future art journey. I hope to keep up to date with any new projects she has in store, and hopefully be able to see them in person one day.

*Michelle Sadorsky is a fourth year student in the Honours Specialization in English Literature and Creative Writing. Passionate about graphic design, she hopes to make a career in the marketing world beyond graduation.*

# PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS

## EMILY PELTIER

BY KAYLEE DUNN

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Emily Peltier is an inspiration for those Arts & Humanities students who feel like they have too many interests for their own good. Since leaving Western University in 2015 with her degree in Visual Arts and Museum Studies, Peltier has engaged with her artistic passions, challenging herself with opportunities outside of her comfort zone, and advocating for 2SLGBTQ+ individuals within her communities. She is pursuing her PhD at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, works as the Program Manager at the non-profit organization Scarborough Arts, is an Industry Programmer for the Toronto Queer Film Festival and supports the Glory Hole Gallery, which she co-founded in 2017.

Following the path of her father, a Western alumnus, Peltier arrived on campus ready to make the best of her undergraduate experience. Her reason for coming to Western, the Museum and Curatorial Studies program, provided her with experiences that shaped her career today. Peltier recalls the fourth year Museum and Curatorial Practicum course where, alongside her peers, she learned valuable lessons about exhibition creation, using archives and collaborating with others in the Art world. The exhibition her group created was “Beneath the Surface: The Archives of Arthur Nestor.” She praises the unique, hands-on experience and global connections she received in her program.

Emily made connections with Forest City Gallery as an intern and volunteer and interned at Museum London as part of her degree. As part of her degree, Peltier also worked as both an intern and a volunteer at London’s Forest City Gallery. This opportunity furthered her understanding of the arts field and institutions within it, while providing her with mentorship and chances to network. The experiences Peltier gained from these internships and gallery roles inspired her next steps.



Early opportunities were advantageous for her, and she urges students to start looking for these chances, and consider internships as the “building blocks for better things.”

As a self-proclaimed introvert, Peltier’s biggest takeaway from her time at Western was a newfound confidence and ability to network. Though Peltier’s current curatorial work includes exhibitions at renowned institutions like the Art Gallery of Ontario, she wasn’t always confident entering the Arts field. Before her first gallery opening, Peltier told herself, “I’m going to try and stay there for 10 minutes, and I’m going to be okay if that’s all I do.” When it comes to those moments of anxiety before trying something new, she suggests taking these “baby steps.” She also recommends attending the showings of your peers to get comfortable with professional experiences and build the relationships you can rely on for the rest of your career.

Peltier knew she wanted to continue her education after Western, but the direction of where to go and what

for seemed uncertain. One of her biggest challenges after graduating was the number of rejections she faced for roles in the arts industry. She turned to landscaping work before deciding to move to Toronto and pursue her Master's of Fine Arts degree in Criticism and Curatorial Practice at OCAD University, with the goal of obtaining an administrative or managerial role, post-graduation.

“Putting that energy out there, putting it down on paper, [and] not giving up” is how Peltier harnessed the power of manifestation to get through the early challenges of her career, and she continues these practices as she pursues her PhD at OISE. While not originally planning on going back to school after her Master's, her passion for supporting 2SLGBTQ+ youth and her experiences in the social sector inspired her studies around adult education and the impact of publicly funded, non-health-specific organizations like non-profits on the health and wellness of 2SLGBTQ+ youth through social programs.

In addition to working on her PhD, Peltier has also spent the past

three years as a Program Manager and Administrator for Scarborough Arts. They take a broad view on what counts as art and makes it accessible for people of all ages and backgrounds through art space, professional development, skill building, and industry-led workshops and programs. Peltier's role requires her to manage staff, oversee the organization's 40+ programs, handle the budget, and develop grants. Financial literacy is undervalued in the Arts despite it being instrumental to securing funding, and she recommends all Arts & Humanities students become familiar with budget management to benefit both their work and personal lives. Peltier's dedication to others and love for her communities is clear in both her studies and her work with Scarborough Arts and The Glory Hole Gallery. The gallery, which Peltier co-founded with artist Sean MacPherson while completing her Master's, started because she noticed a serious lack of spaces for artists and collectives in the Greater Toronto Area. The goal was to “create a space, create a concept, for artists in our community to be supported” and showcase work with diverse and intersectional perspectives, specifically of those

who identify as 2SLGBTQ+. In a world that often still refuses equal opportunity based on sexual or gender identities, the Glory Hole Gallery provides queer creatives with fair pay and opportunities for career development. The gallery hosts exhibitions, screenings, artist talks, and serves as common ground for its own collective. While she acknowledges that it's difficult work, Peltier encourages students to form their own collectives, complete their passion projects, and find and fill the gaps in their own communities. “You do have a lot of power,” she says, “to create something that you want to see.”

Peltier praises her Arts education for providing her with transferable skills, unforgettable work experiences, and amazing lifelong connections for her personal and work lives. “All of my interests, all of the work I was doing, really intersected with one another,” she notes.

For many Arts & Humanities students it is difficult to choose what you want to pursue from a multitude of interests, let Emily serve as inspiration for how to use that multiplicity and consider alternative pathways to success.



## AUTHOR REFLECTION

Emily's work with 2SLGBTQ+ youth is so vital to her communities, and it was an honour to interview someone who is doing so much for others! I was inspired by how she connected her advocacy work to her art, and I hope to create similar connections in my own career. This was my first experience interviewing someone, and I'm so glad I had such a kind-hearted and open subject like Emily. It was such a delight to chat with her and connect over our shared experiences, like working at the Spoke and Wave, and passions, like volunteering in support of 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Since my meeting with Emily, I feel a sense of urgency to go build the career I want from the ground up, make a positive impact in my community, and seek knowledge through art, education, experience, and connection. Knowing that trailblazers like her come from my Faculty helps ease any worries I had about my post-graduate plans.

*Kaylee Dunn is a second-year student pursuing a double major in English Literature and SASAH with a minor in Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies. This is her first work in a Western publication, but certainly not her last.*

# DESIGNING OPPORTUNITIES

## DANA MORNINGSTAR

BY JULIA PIQUET

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As Associate Dean at the School of Design at Fanshawe, Dana Morningstar's busy schedule resembles her students more than most would think. After having been Chairperson for the School of Media, and a Fanshawe faculty member for 20 years, she faces the most pressure during the school term. "It's like a train, that starts kind of slow then it goes up, and up, and up, and then it just stops," she says. "That hard stop at the end of the term is the most pressure, since everyone is vibrating and everyone has deadlines!"

This is not where the similarity between Morningstar's work life stops with the study life of all undergraduates out there. Most mornings, she gets up and checks her emails for urgent matters, but after she gets to work, she tries to avoid her inbox. "I try not to go into my inbox right away because then I get into a vortex of emails," she says. "But a lot of days it happens that way anyways. A typical day for me is not just that day. I'm kind of in the term before, I'm in the day that's happening right then, I'm also in next year and in next term! Always in a rolling cycle of planning." But much like her students, Morningstar's busy schedule does not hinder the love and passion she carries for what she does. She beautifully describes Design as strategic planning for the built environment. She explains how designers take materials from the world, or make materials, and then they put them out into the world for people to use. Whether it's designing a garden, clothing, or a subdivision, design is the practices and processes that help us do the things we do every day. Morningstar describes Art as slightly different



than Design. The same principles apply: one is still working with materials and still making choices, but people are putting a message into the world. They're trying to make others aware of something important, to give pause or inspire a conversation. Art is to make humans ask questions about themselves and help them understand the world, while designers build the world.

As a designer herself, and with many talented faculty and staff, Morningstar has helped build the programs and courses that she feels are beneficial for her students and relevant to the world we live in today. "We can create whole programs," she says. "You'd say I think we should have a course on this, here's why, here's what the textbook would be, and then they would either say yes or no and you would just start it." Among Morningstar's creations is a Public Relations program at Fanshawe, which she spearheaded after noticing that the college had all the courses for

the subject but no certification in the topic. Being given time to work on it by her boss, she spoke to business representatives in the area about what skills Public Relations graduates should bring to the table and then sent up a proposal for the Ministry of Colleges and Universities. “And then somebody there approves it, and they say go.”

Morningstar’s life, in a way, has always been about creating, whether that is opportunities for others or for herself. After graduating with a four-year degree at Western in English and Visual Arts, Morningstar had no master plan for her first-year post-grad. She worked in marketing for two years before eventually applying to Teacher’s College. “I did not think I was going to end up at Fanshawe. I was really trying to be a high school teacher!” After teaching part-time for two years, Morningstar applied for a full-time position

at Fanshawe, teaching courses in English and Public Relations. After eventually completing both her MA and EdD at Western, the opportunity to assume the role of Associate Dean at the School of Design came up. “When I came over to Design, my whole career so far had been English and Public Relations,” says Morningstar. “So, I thought I hadn’t done enough [Design] even though I know a lot about it, and so I chose that.” Morningstar didn’t always know where she would end up, but she is thankful for the chances she’s been given by both institutions.

“Fanshawe has been with me for many years, but so has Western. I did my early education there, then visited in my early 30s and spent two years with them, then five years recently,” she says. “Each time I learned something new and I changed,” says Morningstar, “and I’m really thankful for this variety-filled job that I have, which I think

has a lot to do with the culture at both Fanshawe and Western.” When asked to offer advice to students who are looking to join academia, Morningstar noted how “we all have strengths and weaknesses, so you load up on the strengths and you say, ‘hey I’m not good at that’ and you leave that alone. Don’t be too hard on yourself or too serious.” She added, “There are a few people who know their life path really early, and they really go for it with that inherent DNA for organization, but I don’t think that’s most people. I think most people discover things, they try something and then they discover something else, and then it leads to the next thing.”



## AUTHOR REFLECTION

Dana is perhaps one of the most insightful individuals I’ve ever spoken to. Maybe that is because she is a part of the very people our colleges and universities hire to keep us in check and sane - or maybe that is because Dana is just awesome. I’m inclined to think the latter: the way she speaks about her job, and the passion she holds for it is insane. As she spoke about the SATELLITE Project Space, a collaborative project between Fanshawe and Western that offers students opportunities to have their art displayed in a little art gallery in downtown, I knew Dana meant it when she said she loved creating opportunities and changes around her. I feel very grateful to have had this time with her, and I hope this feature interview was able to capture the tiniest bit of her incredible life and mind. I know she’ll continue to inspire others like she inspired me. Thank you, Dana!

*Julia Piquet is a third-year student in the Honours Specialization in English and Creative Writing. She hopes to pursue a career in academia and work as a professor.*

# THE NEW(S) AND THE UNEXPECTED

KATE WILKINSON

BY JULIA PIQUET

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Kate Wilkinson's love for reading and writing began with her parents reading *The Globe and Mail* to her, exposing her young mind to all types of new information. "I grew up in a very nerdy household," she laughs as she reminisces. Today, Wilkinson works as a Content Editor for the opinion section of that very same newspaper. Whether a simple coincidence or destined fate, Wilkinson has kept up the habits from her childhood that have led her to this stage of her life. From the moment she opens her eyes in the morning, she checks the morning newsletters from the American newspapers she receives in her inbox, such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. "I have a bad habit of looking at my phone immediately," she says. "I just try to absorb as many news items as possible in the morning."

When asked about her work routine, Wilkinson describes a day filled with collaborative team meetings and daily tasks, with each day offering her a fresh piece of information or a story to write and learn about. "I handle all kinds of stories that come through, whatever is happening at any particular moment in time," she says. "It's a bit different from the news, because someone is expressing an opinion, but that allows you to become a surface level expert in a multitude of topics." To have something new and exciting to work on every day has always been Wilkinson's goal, but she didn't always know that she would find that thrill in the journalism industry.

During her time at Western, Wilkinson went from being an undergraduate with a double major in English and History to completing a one-year Master's in History. She loved Western so much that she even considered coming back again for a PhD in the same subject, or completely changing it up



and branching out into Law. But neither taking the LSATs nor dedicating herself to one particular topic really excited her. "There are people who can do that, and I am not one of them," she says. "I've got too many interests to just pick one!"

It was during her MA program that Wilkinson started writing for the *Western Gazette*, an experience that would eventually culminate in her application for journalism school. "I would do concert reviews, go to art galleries, interview actors or whoever was coming through London that week," she says. "From there, I put together a little portfolio and applied." When asked about her memories at Western, Wilkinson spoke fondly about how Western set her up for her next big adventure and that she never felt stagnated during her undergraduate years. "If you're lucky, you'll never stop learning." After graduating from journalism school, Wilkinson moved to Toronto, only to discover that there was a lot of doom and gloom in the journalism industry. "Admittedly, the industry is still trying to figure it out how to thrive in the digital era," she says. When asked to explain further, she

describes an industry that was actively creating jobs that would have never existed five years prior; an industry that was trying to sort itself out and figure out how much it could pay people and how many people it could take on. “The path of going right into being a reporter or an editor, I don’t see it happen very often,” she says. “Usually, people have done all kinds of interesting things and cobbled together experiences, as opposed to what we would consider the traditional side of journalism.”

Wilkinson notes that, while being a traditional journalist is a central part of her identity, she is more concerned about herself as an individual and not where she works. “As long as I am loving it, and still am in the industry, I’m a journalist.” Ultimately, she is thankful that she travelled down unconventional roads, despite how intimidating and anxiety-inducing they seemed. It was through these unusual choices that she had one of her “big life experiences.” She attended the Fellowship at Auschwitz for the Study of Professional Ethics, a program that

takes early career young professionals (such as lawyers, doctors, and journalists) travelling for two weeks, going everywhere from New York to Berlin to Auschwitz. There, these young professionals learned about professionals in their field who had their ethics challenged and the ways they could be compromised, all in the context of the Holocaust. It was during this fellowship that Wilkinson knew she had picked the right profession. “I needed to work in an industry that made me feel like I could do something on a daily basis for the crazy world that we live in.”

When asked to offer advice to students who want to follow a similar path, Wilkinson spoke about the ever-changing journalism industry and warned against getting discouraged by the unclear and unconventional road she herself faced. “There’s a whole section of the newsroom these days called Audience, which is all about optimizing content on the back-end so that we find readership since retaining subscribers is so important,” she

says. “Even though those people are all journalists by training and have an editorial view, they’re also very good with all kinds of tech.” Journalism is no longer restricted to traditional reporting, writing, and editing. With the influence of technology and the internet, journalism has branched into uncharted territories. Just as Wilkinson faced the shifting journalism as a young journalist, recent and soon-to-be graduates will also be confronting an industry in flux. “But that’s pretty much a day in the life of a journalist! It’s something different every single day.”



## AUTHOR REFLECTION

Interviewing Kate felt like I had suddenly gained a ‘big sister’ in the journalism industry. A lovely person, she is obviously passionate her work and it was so extremely refreshing to hear from someone in her position that it’s okay if things don’t work out the way you want them to – in fact, it’s more likely that they won’t! Kate is an easy choice for a role model for anyone looking for one: she has been there, done that, and is open to speaking about it. Learning about her life has been an incredible opportunity and writing about it has given me the opportunity to reflect on my own future and all I had planned down to tiny, tiny details. She’s given me much to think about, and I hope that this interview can do her mind, work, and life justice and give anyone who reads it much to think about as well! Thank you, Kate!

*Julia Piquet is a third-year student in the Honours Specialization in English and Creative Writing. She hopes to pursue a career in academia and work as a professor.*

# ADVENTURES IN LEARNING

## BRENT HOLMES

BY KATE ARMSTRONG

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For Brent Holmes, BA '14, the “big thing” in life is “finding your community and then trying to figure out how you can stay with that community.” Community is what brought him to Western in 2010, what fostered his love of journalism, and what is guiding him through his career. He began his undergraduate degree with the intention of completing a double major in Political Science and English at Huron, but quickly realized it wasn't for him.

“These aren't the people who I'm feeling a real connection to,” he remembers thinking. Film was the next obvious choice for Holmes, who switched to studying English and Film with a minor in Political Science. His small sized Arts classes offered him the chance to meet students from all walks of life, and critically engage with course content.

The students weren't the only people who changed Holmes' perspective, though. His first ever university lecture, Forms of Narrative with Dr. Neil Brooks, was one that would spur him towards finding his passion for journalism. “He was so receptive, so kind, so generous,” says Holmes about his professor. Dr. Brooks came to class in a suit every lecture, save for the lecture following the murder of Trayvon Martin, when he wore a hoodie to teach about the position of Black people in America. This lecture represented a moment of enlightenment that Holmes has carried throughout his life. Dr. Brooks encouraged Holmes from the very beginning of his journalism career. When Cameron Bailey, the current CEO of TIFF and Western alum visited campus, Dr. Brooks was the one who told Holmes to go for it. He knew his students well enough to make the connection between Holmes' love of film and the incredible opportunity it would be to interview Bailey.

Film, in many ways, marked Holmes' entry into journalism. Over his holiday break one year, he sat down to write five movie reviews for the Western Gazette, “just to see what would happen.” All five were published. From there, he became the Arts and Life Editor for the rest of his undergraduate career at Western. He put his all into the role and was honoured with the title of Editor of the Year.



More importantly, Holmes tells me, was the recognition he received for Excellence with Volunteers. “That was the award where it was like, ‘hey, you've worked as a team and you investing in people,’” returning once again to the community Holmes values.

Having completed his undergraduate degree, Holmes was ready to leave the comfort of Southwestern Ontario, and began his Master's Degree in Journalism at the University of British Columbia. “The luxury I had [in my undergrad] was...this is fun for me. And then the second degree was how I [got] my career,” he says. UBC allowed him to intern with TIFF, writing director biographies for the festival, VICE, Discourse Media, The Tyee, The Globe and Mail, and the Standard-Freeholder. He gained a plethora of experience in a variety of media formats and managed the mass transition from print to digital. Journalism, Holmes notes, has advanced past the written word: “You're going to have to know how to do it all.” From copywriting to video content, the idea of journalism is evolving.

“Change is always scary,” Holmes says. “But I think you can [do well], if you prepare for it, kind of weather those changes and thrive.”

Having a strong motivation is one way to thrive through stress and change. For Holmes, the most important stories he's written have been ones that shed light on important societal issues. In his 2017 article for VICE entitled "How Rejected Men Use Fake Tinder Profiles to Torment Women," Holmes aims to educate readers about the danger women face while they are on dating apps. "This is something that people should know about," he says. "I want to make sure people are safe." His second article for VICE highlighted the atrocity that is the Vancouver housing market. For Holmes, writing and creating is another way to connect with community and make a difference in the lives of others.

Holmes is on the brink of an exciting adventure across the Atlantic later this year. He is leaving his position as a Communications and Social Media Specialist for the Political Science and Sociology departments at UBC to move to Bristol, United Kingdom. "I learned so much about myself moving from London to Vancouver, and I expect I'll learn a lot more about myself moving from Vancouver to Bristol."

As Holmes's friends have spread their wings further from UBC, he is ready to take on his new adventure. Again, he stresses

the importance of community, noting that "it's not the city, it's the people you love." His advice for students? "Invest in the people around you... appreciate them, make them feel valued." Without his community of supporters, Holmes would certainly have had a different path in life. Being open to opportunities and seeking out ways to follow our passions is crucial in life, and university provides a perfect place to do so.

"Step one is finding the people. And then step two is figure out how you can get a job or position that allows you to be with the people who you love."



## AUTHOR REFLECTION

Interviewing Brent was such an eye-opening experience. We discussed everything from Dungeons and Dragons to Spike Lee, and I have added a few new movies to my watchlist! Brent has encouraged me to continue to find my people here at Western and beyond, and to be ready for exciting opportunities to arise. His dog, Watson (of Sherlock Holmes fame), even made it to the interview, rounding out the positive atmosphere. I am so grateful I had the opportunity to speak with Brent and will value his advice and ideas for years to come!

*Kate Armstrong is a second year student in the School for Advanced Studies in the Arts & Humanities and Sociology. She is excited to see where the future takes her, and to continue doing cool things like writing for Spotlight.*

**“INVEST IN THE  
PEOPLE AROUND  
YOU...  
APPRECIATE THEM,  
MAKE THEM FEEL  
VALUED.”**

BRENT HOLMES, BA '14

**“YOU HAVE A LOT OF  
POWER TO  
CREATE  
SOMETHING  
YOU WANT  
TO SEE.”**

EMILY PELTIER, BA '15

# FINDING A NEW VOICE

GABRIELLE DROLET

BY BRYN LEWIS

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Chances are, you've come into contact with Gabrielle Drolet's work in the past, even if you weren't aware at the time. Drolet, BA '16, has lent her voice and cartoons to such publications as *The New Yorker*, *Catapult*, and *The Walrus*, to name a few.

But before she was verified on Twitter or a bonafide voice on the Canadian journalism scene, Drolet was, like many students, wondering where best to channel her creative impulses and talents. She had originally enrolled at Dalhousie to study English Literature and French with the intention of becoming a teacher, but found that neither the school nor the program was a good fit. She had been eager to expand her horizons, picking Dalhousie in part because of its distance from her hometown of Burlington, Ontario.

She transferred to Western in second year, enticed by the English and Creative Writing program. Drolet went on to become the Student Writer-in-Residence for the 2019-20 school year, writing nature poetry and fiction.

Having missed O-Week as a second-year transfer student, Drolet joined the *Gazette* as a writer and eventually, as an Opinions editor, with the hopes of meeting like-minded students and honing her interest in writing for publication. She enjoyed her *Gazette* experience, vividly recalling her first published articles and source interviews. Like many student editors, she spent a lot of her free time in between classes hanging out in the *Gazette* office in the UCC, and eventually came to realize that the publication only ever wrote on issues that were directly connected to the university—which, while understandable, was not for her. Looking for a way to write about the topics that interested her, she began pitching ideas to publications like *Teen Vogue* and the *Globe and Mail*. She liked seeing her name on these sites, with articles like "Gen Z is the generation most stressed out by politics" for *Teen Vogue* and "Sex work comes home," a look



into sex work in the early days of the pandemic that was published by *The New York Times*. Still, even as she was becoming more well known and garnering more publication credits, she felt unsure of what it meant to work as a freelance writer.

After graduating from Western in 2020, Drolet left London to work on an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Guelph (via their Toronto campus), where she worked away at a novel as her thesis project. In February 2021, though, she began experiencing an extreme pain in her hands, arms, and wrists. She took it seriously from the first pain she felt, seeking out a diagnosis which was, for six months at least, carpal tunnel syndrome.

The excruciating pain was not, in fact, carpal tunnel syndrome, but rather a nerve condition known as "thoracic outlet syndrome," which is characterized by symptoms of extreme pain in the shoulders, arms and hands. It makes everyday tasks difficult or impossible. For Drolet, this condition has meant being unable to hold a pen or type—not ideal for an up-and-coming writer or a cartoonist who had

just sold her first New Yorker cartoon. Getting back to writing was a complicated process. She started slowly, using voice-to-text programs and finding that fiction was now newly difficult for her—she couldn't recapture the voice behind her fiction work with voice-to-text. With her return to school fast approaching, she made the decision to take time off. With her new condition, she felt that she couldn't hold a job and work on her thesis, choosing work over school as she adjusted to a new way of life. She has since pivoted to personal essays and articles, writing on culture, cooking, and her life with a physical impairment. Among this personal writing is the essay that she considers her "magnum opus"—a piece for The Walrus called "In Defence of Garlic in a Jar: How Food Snobs Almost Ruined My Love of Cooking." It's an essay that chronicles some of the many challenges Drolet faces as a result of her disability, but more than simply cataloguing them, it grapples with the grief that comes with a diagnosis of this kind.

With Drolet's increasing publication credits comes a newfound confidence in herself and her ideas as a writer. She

shares that she has established that getting published is about being able to pitch yourself—straight to an editor, not through whatever submission link the publication offers on their website. Drolet follows the formula of *'Hi, I'm... I've written for...can I write about this?'*. This, too, has gotten easier since she has become more established, finding that editors will now even reach out to her about writing for their publication. When starting out, though, she notes that Twitter can be a useful tool for finding editors to pitch. It's about building relationships.

To an extent, Drolet wonders if her schooling made her too focused on finding a job in the exact field she studied—in her own case, she wonders if it made her too fixed on finding a job as a writer, as opposed to trying new things and being open to new experiences. To figure out what she wanted, Drolet notes, she had to keep producing, eventually experimenting with cartooning. Her cartoons gave her a creative outlet and the chance for publication without being strictly writing-related. They have been published in The New Yorker, more

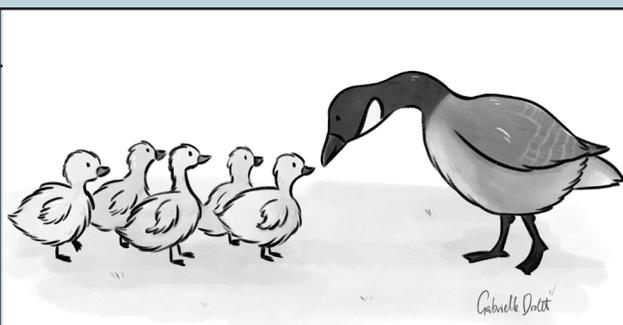
than once. (For example, at the time of writing, she has a cartoon featured in the February 20, 2023 edition with the tagline, "Do you want me to make you a tea you'll forget about until it's gross and cold?"). She notes that life experience matters—it is difficult to truly know what you want to do, or what work you might be good at until you produce work, gain experiences, and try new things.

Having recently returned to school (remotely) to complete her MFA, Drolet is setting aside fiction, for now. She is, instead, working on a collection on personal essays which are, at least in part, concerned with the last two years of her life, along the same vein as the articles for The Walrus and Catapult. A fluent French-speaker, she moved to Montreal and feels at home there, grateful that she can work remotely in a city that feels like a small town, letting her run into people she knows while perusing her neighbourhood bakeries. Even with her physical disability, Drolet notes that she is living the life she would have wanted for herself as a kid—even if she didn't know then what that life would be.

## AUTHOR REFLECTION

Gabrielle was so incredible to connect with! Throughout the course of our conversation, she dispensed invaluable wisdom on everything from publishing and pitching to experimenting with new ways of exercising creativity. Gabrielle also understands that some of the most important education a person can receive is experience. I feel emboldened by this interview to take steps to put myself and my work out into the world, so that I may begin building a life beyond Western, but armed with the lessons learned here. I'm excited to follow Gabrielle's work (and her thoughtful advice!) going forward.

*Bryn Lewis is a fourth-year student receiving an Honours BA in English Language and Literature and Creative Writing.*



*"Today, we learn how to terrorize the park."*

# TAKING THE DIFFICULT PATH

## LAURA CURTIS FERRERA

BY MARY HAMILTON

Laura Curtis Ferrera, BA '93, knew what she wanted to do after she graduated from Western.

“I was not at all flexible about what I was going to do after,” she says. “I knew I was either going to be a marketer, an advertiser, an event planner, or in communications—you know, public relations, government relations, something in that sphere.”

In the end, though, she didn't have to choose between any one of these possibilities. Her role as Global Chief Marketing Officer at Scotiabank encompasses elements of each of these career considerations. It sees her working on a variety of community-driven initiatives that puts Scotiabank at the forefront of a prospective client's mind when considering their financial futures.

Although Curtis Ferrera had a clear idea of where she was headed after Western, she was less certain of what shape her Western journey should take when she started her university career. Still, unlike many students, she was content in the not-knowing, even noting that she chose Western in part because she felt it was the school most likely to allow her the space to truly explore a wide variety of topics and interests. “I wanted to have a really investigative learning journey, as opposed this is what I want to do, this is the only thing I want to do,” she explains.

Curtis Ferrera originally enrolled with the hope of studying Art or Art History, but like many students, found her ambitions turned by one professor—Dr. Madeline Lennon. She had taken a first year survey course in Western Literature and Civilizations, and found herself thinking, “I just want to do any single course this woman teaches.” And everything else followed because of that one professor.

“I think that's the most incredibly wonderful way to have a university education, to be inspired by a course and let that guide you,” she says. She appreciated the breadth of topics she could focus on as a student, noting that her classes allowed for her to “go broad,” learning a little about a lot. “I



never really double-clicked or said, there it is, I'm going to go really deep into this one area. I just did an awful lot of investigation. And, I will tell you, it has served me so well.”

After graduating, she followed up on her plan to work in communications with a Post Graduate degree in Communications from Humber College. But neither her Humber certification nor her Western were the final stops in her quest to learn. Curtis Ferrera is a lifelong learner, a quality she closely attributes to the Arts. She hadn't planned to work in finance, originally finding herself working in public relations for consumer packaged goods (“like everyday things you buy”), but she found the work unfulfilling. A journalist didn't need her to explain, say, toilet paper, to them. It wasn't until someone suggested that she consider finance that she first considered this “interesting” career shift. She notes that prior to working for Scotiabank, she wasn't versed in financial lingo—a common concern amongst Arts graduates. To teach herself, she picked up a book, and followed up on a lead from a fellow Western grad to work for a mutual fund trade association.

“I picked a hard path, for sure,” she says of teaching herself the ins and outs of the financial world. “But there is a whole series of post-graduate courses that you can take now that are concentrated programs for marketers who are either in

finance themselves or want to be comfortable with how the financial system works.”

“So, I did that as well,” she adds.

Curtis Ferrera’s tenure at Scotiabank has been marked by a series of Arts-inspired initiatives with programs like Little Free Library, which sees accessible, free outdoor libraries installed in communities across the country—particularly in geographic areas with historically less access to literature, known as “book deserts.” This, coupled with parallel programs like Hockey For All as well as Scotiabank’s support of the Giller Prize, is rooted in the values that are inherent to and well instilled in the Arts & Humanities graduate. They are initiatives that seek a creative way to connect people to their banks and designate Scotiabank locations across the country as neighborhood hubs. Describing her position with Scotiabank, Curtis Ferrera notes that her job is concerned with more than simply bringing new customers to the company, but rather, about asking questions like, “How can I help customers be better off? How

can I help communities be better off?”

When asked if her Arts background influences the kinds of projects she backs in her position with Scotiabank, Curtis Ferrera’s answer is emphatic: “100%.”

“There’s just no doubt that my interest in the Arts, my passion for the Arts, comes through loud and clear in terms of where I spend my time, professionally,” she says. “That’s why I’m so passionate about having more Arts & Humanities students coming into marketing, and the banking sector as a whole,” she explains. “They tend to usher in new thinking. I see it in meetings. I see it in how they approach ideas and problems they’re encountering.”

Arts & Humanities students are familiar with the belief that they are entering the job market at a disadvantage, but Curtis Ferrera affirms that Arts students often have just what a hiring manager is looking for. She cites “strong communication skills (both written and oral),” as well as innovative thinking, and a willingness to work collaboratively, as desirable skills for any new or prospective hire to possess. And she

stresses the importance of allowing yourself the space to explore new ideas and subjects—after all, “You don’t often get the chance to go back and spend another four years investigating the world around you.”

“I will say this,” Curtis Ferrera adds, “I’m not sure when it became true that you have to know what your whole life is going to look like in your twenties. They should be a time for investigation and reflection and growth. Having an Arts & Humanities degree is a privilege, and you owe it to yourself to spend some time investigating the topics that interest you.”



## AUTHOR REFLECTION

My interview with Laura could not have come at a better time. As I prepare to graduate, I am often worried about my prospects as an Arts student, but Laura understands the sheer power of an Arts degree. Our conversation also served as a reminder of the importance of being open to new learning experiences and interested in taking the unexpected career path. Laura was incredibly generous in taking time out of her busy schedule to speak to Spotlight this year, and I am so grateful for the warmth and enthusiasm she brought to her reflections on the Arts & Humanities experience.

*Mary Hamilton is a fourth-year English and Creative Writing student, graduating this Spring. Going forward, she is excited to read Spotlight as an alumna herself.*

# IN THE CREATIVE WORLD

**ANNA WILSON**

BY **ALYSSA DUARTE**

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Beginning her undergraduate career at Western, Anna Wilson was not entirely sure where her creativity would lead her. However, one thing that did seem certain was that Western would provide her with an open landscape to find her true calling. After some consideration, Wilson left Western with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Visual Arts and a minor in Psychology.

For Wilson, life as an undergraduate was both rewarding and challenging. Having applied to three universities, she was drawn to Western because of the rigorous application process as well as the initial opportunity to network with renowned professors. “The process of submitting a portfolio and having an interview was really important to me,” says Wilson. “Western had that extra layer of meeting the professors. It felt like I was being integrated into the program before I was even officially in. I really had to put in extra work” she explains. “To know I was accepted because of those two factors combined meant a lot to me as a young, growing artist. And to have these professors who they, themselves were professional artists assess that was something that stood out to me. It still is.”

Despite this, Wilson didn’t have a clear idea of what the professional world had in store for her. While she always had a passion for the arts, she feared that pursuing it was too risky a choice. Initially intrigued by psychology as a subject of interest, Wilson decided that she would pair it with her passion for creativity and become an art therapist. But once second year rolled around, she found herself questioning whether she made the right choice. “As I took the psychology courses versus the visual arts courses it became clear that I no longer wanted to be an art therapist.” Still indecisive, Wilson continued to seek a career which she felt would suit her well. It wasn’t until



her third year that she was fully confident in her choice to pursue a career as an artist. “I considered becoming a teacher – just because that’s one of the only career paths that seems to make sense with an art degree. But as time went on, I knew I only wanted to be an artist.”

At Western, Wilson gained an incredible amount of experience, developing a sense of belonging within the Department of Visual Arts. She most notably recounts how in her fourth year she was a part of the practicum exhibition “Senders.” For Wilson, this platform provided her with an opportunity to grow her confidence, showcase her artwork, and to interact and collaborate with other artists which she continues to do today. She was also fortunate enough to find a mentor in Professor David Merrit, who she recalls “opened her eyes” and encouraged her towards a career in the arts. “I’m grateful that I had the opportunity to have David as a professor and now that I am a graduate and a working artist. I also appreciate him as an artist, too.”

Throughout her undergraduate career, Wilson worked as an instructor at ArtVenture Art Studio in London. When she graduated from Western in 2018, she spent her summer working full-time as Director of the studio and part-time as a barista. Still, like many graduates, she described feeling “unsure” of what she would do once the summer ended. “It’s a universal experience” she explains. “A lot of people don’t talk about it, but really no matter how successful your education was, you’re going to feel lost. And that’s ok.” Though she considered applying for a Master’s degree, she ultimately wanted to leave behind the academic world in favour of new experiences.

Wilson’s path soon became clear when she was granted a yearlong residency at the TAP Centre for Creativity. Noted as one of the most influential moments in her career, TAP allowed her the opportunity to truly immerse herself in her art. Over the course of a year, she received a free private studio, a materials budget, and a solo exhibition in June 2019. “This was very important to

my growth as an artist,” she recalls. “The residency provided an artist community and the resources needed for an artist early in their career.”

Wilson has gone to great lengths to find her place in the creative world. Today, she works three days a week at Westland Gallery as Marketing Coordinator and dedicates the remainder of her time to her home studio, working on drawing projects supported by the Canada Council of the Arts. Living what most may consider a double life, Wilson expresses the importance of intertwining these two daily routines. “I love my studio and I really work well by myself in the quiet. My studio has always been a private studio. It’s very secluded and that’s good for working on my art, but I still need to be able to socialize,” says Wilson. “The gallery prompts me with the space to meet other artists in the community and to help them promote their work.” As an emerging artist, Wilson is currently working on a large-scale drawing for which she received funding from the Explore and Create component – a

fund available for Canadian artists committed to creating vibrant and diverse art.

Wilson continues to work in the community, taking risks and finding new ways to foster and explore her creativity. When asked what advice she has for young artists, she states, “Apply to every opportunity. It may sound cliché but it applies to both students and graduates. Apply to every job. Apply to every exhibition you want to be in. Apply to every grant you see and want because even if you feel as though you’re not qualified you could be and you could end up with something amazing. Just go for it.”



## AUTHOR REFLECTION

My conversation with Anna reminded me that while an Arts degree may not always have a direct route into the workforce, that doesn’t mean it won’t offer a multitude of options for the future. Her path to success shows that when you value yourself as an artist, you begin to trust yourself more and eventually realize what you are capable of achieving. I’m hopeful that Anna’s story will help foster, encourage and amplify the voices of others who wish to pursue a degree in the Arts. Once again, I am honoured to be part of such an amazing publication. It truly is rewarding to connect and learn from some of the faculty’s most renowned graduates each year!

*Alyssa Duarte is a third-year student pursuing an Honours Spec. in Creative Writing and English Language and Literature with a minor in MIT. She hopes to pursue a career in journalism.*

# AN ENDURING ARTS EDUCATION

## PAMELA UPPAL

BY ELLA EUM

After graduating from the University of Toronto with a double major in Philosophy and Women and Gender Studies, Pamela Uppal knew she wanted to make a difference. She loved her Women and Gender Studies program and wanted to pursue more education, resulting in submitting applications for Master's programs in Women's Studies across Ontario. She was thrilled to accept her offer from Western University for a Master's Program in Women's Studies & Feminist Research (now, Gender Studies & Women's Studies), mainly because of its guaranteed TA experience. Uppal found her TA ship at Western extremely valuable as she earned the skills to teach young students and facilitate the lessons which she herself was learning just a few years prior. As a TA, she assumed the role of a mentor to her students, often finding herself comforting the nerves of anxious first-years, new to university life.

Once in the Master's program at Western, Uppal was introduced to various areas of research, ranging from social policy to critical race theory, taught by supportive professors who showed an interest in her personal and professional growth. She fondly remembers a social policy course taught by Professor Carol Agocs, in which she was given the opportunity to analyze Ontario Works, a program providing social assistance across Ontario and identify its weak points and propose policies to resolve the issues.

As a student in an Arts program, Uppal was often questioned about what she would pursue after her Master's. It's a question many Arts students are familiar with: what kind of job will you find with your Arts degree? This question did not shake Uppal's faith in her program, which she knew would teach her the soft skills that would aid her in finding a job. Reflecting on the intersections between her Master's program and her interest in social work and nonprofits,



she enthusiastically explained how her program taught her “to be a critical thinker, how to read and write, and how to publish your work, which are basic skills for any job.” She continues, “I’ve learned how to do research from a feminist lens, a racial lens, from an anti-racism lens and that has informed everything that I’ve done since, from my work as a frontline worker interacting with vulnerable populations, as a freelance research assistant, a program developer for diversity and equity training, a project lead, as a policy advisor, and now a policy director. I don’t think I would have ended up [as a policy director] without my women’s studies background”.

As a Policy Director at the Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN), Uppal’s day-to-day activities involve “reading, writing, presenting, and analyzing policies to give recommendations, and hearing from the nonprofit sector about public policy issues impacting them and the communities they serve.” Uppal does advocacy work on behalf of nonprofit organizations at the provincial, federal, and municipal levels and to non-government funders, ensuring that nonprofit

sector workers are treated well and that there is enough funding for the services they provide. The ONN is involved with policy and advocacy work, both with and for the nonprofit sector. Local community organizations such as shelters, food banks, social services agencies, settlement agencies, women's organizations, festivals, and arts and sports are all nonprofit community-based organizations whose policies the ONN manages.

Uppal describes her role at ONN as an intersection of everything she is passionate about: research, policy, advocacy, and a particular interest in women workers. Her involvement in advocating for these workers is the reason Uppal finds her job so fulfilling. One specific policy area that Uppal is working on is the HR crisis in the nonprofit sector, which has been worsened by the pandemic. Uppal has been advocating for the government to better recognize the importance of the nonprofit sector and provide it with the funding to recruit and retain workers, who are essential for

organizations to deliver the services that build thriving communities.

In 2013, Uppal came across a Facebook group called Laadliyan, a group working to empower South Asian women and girls in the community. Interested in researching gender equity, particularly in South Asian communities, Uppal reached out to the founder and messaged, "Let's meet for coffee." Since their meeting, she has been involved with Laadliyan in one way or another and has helped grow the organization from a Facebook group to a fully incorporated nonprofit with chapters in many universities and cities, all centred around education, research, advocacy, and public policy work, facilitating difficult conversations about gender equality in the community.

Reflecting on her career, she recognizes becoming a Policy Director as a significant accomplishment. Uppal notes that she didn't reach her position by formally studying public policy, but rather, through the knowledge and skills developed from her women's studies

background. She shares, "a Women's Studies degree is so interdisciplinary, you can do anything you want. So, don't feel like you're being pigeonholed or that you won't get a job. You're going to come out [of the program] as the most amazing writer and critical thinker and have a great analytical mind that you can do anything with." She continues, "There are umpteen pathways with this degree. You can do anything from teaching, working in corporate social responsibility, working with charities and foundations, and more. How the degree teaches you to think, write, and analyze the world is very unique and very much sought after." Uppal's words call Arts & Humanities students to be confident in their work at Western. Uppal understands how their experiences in the Arts will open them up to many possible paths.



## AUTHOR REFLECTION

Interviewing Pamela for Spotlight was a great experience, and her story was personally very motivating. Talking with her made me realize that there are many different career paths that I can explore and venture down, and I've learned that an Arts degree is anything but a narrow path. She's given me the courage to pursue the things that I really love doing and stay passionate about changing the community around me. After hearing about the different ways her program has helped throughout her dynamic career, I'm excited to see what kind of opportunities my arts degree may bring in the future.

*Ella Eum is in her final year at Western University, studying Political Science and Philosophy. She is excited to graduate and start her own career journey to see where her undergrad experiences at Western will take her.*

# A LIBRARY OF OPTIONS

## MELANIE MILLS

BY **ABBIE FASERUK**

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The story of Melanie Mills's career journey which led to her current role as Director, FIMS Graduate Library, a special, Faculty-based academic library at Western University, is tied with the themes of her love of learning, deep connection to the human condition, and tendency to embrace the unknown. For Mills, when she began her undergraduate degree in English Language and Literature at Western, she did not know what career awaited her and took this in open arms as she explains, "I was never a person that came to university thinking, this is a path to a job. I was there to learn and to expand my mind, and I think studying the Arts and Humanities facilitates this." After taking a range of classes in her first year, Mills decided to pursue an English degree as she discovered it was a subject she enjoyed, did well in, and was drawn to as a result of passionate professors who cared deeply about the course material and their students. A lingering interest in the Arts was also something Mills brought along with her when making this decision: "I grew up in a home that was just filled with the Arts," Mills explains. Before coming to Western, Mills's late Mother, Giller-Prize winning Canadian author Bonnie Burnard, had been a Writer-in-Residence at Western. Melanie's older sister studied music and vocal performance at Western, and as a London community member, Western's well-known Arts and Humanities program made pragmatic sense. Little did Mills know, this decision to pursue an English degree was among the first steps that would lead her towards building the knowledge and skills she would use in her future career.

Speaking with Mills revealed the often unnoticed skills acquired when studying language and literature: empathy and cultivating human connections. Besides the skills in reading, writing, and effective communication her English degree afforded her, Mills explains that the study of language and literature "broadens and expands our perspective" and teaches us "to be a human being first, before everything else." Mills describes how literature can teach us that we are all connected, and fondly recalls a fourth-year seminar



course she enrolled in called 'The Novel,' taught by Larry Garber, where she was immersed into learning canonical fiction. Mills recalls how engaging her professor was, and explains that learning was "a joint and collegial effort, and I loved that. I felt like my opinions and perspectives were truly valued." Mills's experience is a true reflection of the passion held by the professors in the Arts and Humanities, and how they can influence their students' lives. In fact, it was a conversation Mills had with a professor in her fourth-year of undergrad that Mills describes as "life-altering," because this professor suggested she pursue a graduate degree in Library and Information Science. After finishing her undergraduate degree, Mills turned the page and began her next chapter as a graduate student in the MLIS program at Western.

Mills approached her graduate degree with the same philosophy as she did with her English degree: she was ready to learn and embrace the unknown. In the MLIS program she learned about information sources, organization, and retrieval, and gained skills in teaching, technology, and critical thinking – all things Mills explained would benefit her in a number of roles throughout her career in academic librarianship. As it turns out, Mills never had to stray too far from libraries or from the university, as she began working part-time in The D.B. Weldon Library while enrolled as a graduate student, which turned out to be only the first of many various and diverse roles she's enjoyed over a now decades-long career at Western University and its wider campus network.

Throughout her career Mills has climbed the ladder as she has held multiple positions at Western, including serving as the English & Outreach Services Librarian for more than a decade, as Acting Director of the former Education Library,

and more recently as the Director of Library & Learning Services at Huron University, a role Mills held for more than five years, before returning to Western in her current role in August 2022.

But Mills's story is still far from finished. In January 2023, a month after our conversation took place, Mills became the 2023 President of the Ontario Library Association (OLA), Canada's largest, and longest-running non-profit library association. Mills explains that a co-worker had suggested that she consider the challenge, and Mills decided this was something she wanted to do. "I feel like I can have a positive influence on shaping the future direction of the Association and the profession of librarianship," Mills states. Additionally, Mills is also conducting practitioner research. Her current projects include a study into academic librarians' experience and perceptions of interim leadership roles in Canadian university libraries, as well as a new project investigating the core curriculum, and desired knowledges, skills and aptitudes (KSAs) needed by graduates of Canadian LIS programs. Mills's success is a grand example of

why students considering the Arts and Humanities as their home Faculty should not stray away from doing so. Mills states that she believes "we need people who are open-minded and empathetic and who are not only open to understanding other people's stories and experiences, but are actively seeking them out," and this is what the Arts and Humanities does. In her career as an academic librarian and university administrator, Mills states that the power of story is not something to be overlooked, because it helps us to relate and to be open to one another: "My English degree has allowed me to articulate and to form ideas in such a way that I can also invite and encourage others to strive to be open." This helps Mills to do what she calls "causing good trouble," meaning that if there are issues in systems, structures, or policies that she faces, either in her work in libraries, in her broader profession, or in higher education and society, her empathy and ability to be open to others' perspectives and stories lived experiences helps her strive to make better, more community-minded decisions. In addition to encouraging students considering the Arts to pursue it, Mills also volunteers the following

advice for students who are not even in the Arts. "If you're thinking of coming to university, don't discount the Arts and Humanities," she says, "it's not going to be a waste of your time or your energy. If anything it will strengthen your experience at university and enrich your life beyond it."

Mills's love of learning, openness, and humanity led to her well-deserved career as the Director of the FIMS Graduate Library at Western, and current President of the OLA. During our conversation, Mills kindly shared with me a piece of advice her mother used to say to her: "The harder you work the luckier you get." Mills is a true testament to the fact that if you work hard, you can achieve your goals, and hopefully this is helpful to all students in the Arts and Humanities and those currently deciding on their future academic career. After all, you never know where your story will take you and you may just end up in an awesome career! Just take it from Mills: "Librarianship is pretty awesome [...]. I have no regrets."



## AUTHOR REFLECTION

I can't emphasize enough how rewarding my experience was interviewing Melanie. As an undergraduate student pursuing an English degree at Western with the hopes of someday entering an MLIS program, Melanie was the perfect person to talk to. Melanie made me realize that although the skills I have gained over the past four years such as reading and writing are valuable, what might be the most valuable is the ability to connect and understand people, and that the human condition can be understood through the literature I am studying. I learned from Melanie to grab onto opportunities as they arise, and that instead of stressing I should be embracing what I am learning and who I am becoming. This is a lesson that I am going to carry with me throughout my last year of my undergrad, and hopefully, throughout the rest of my career... whatever that may be.

*Abbie Faseruk is a fourth-year student pursuing an Honours Specialization in English Language and Literature and a Major in History. Her goal is to someday complete a Masters degree in Library and Information Science.*

# GENDER & JUSTICE

## KIMBERLEY D. CAINES-BEST

BY MICHELLE SADORSKY

“When I walked onto the campus at Western, in 2002, it just felt like home.” That was Kimberley Caines-Best’s first impression when she visited the university. Four years later, Caines-Best would graduate from Western with an Honours in Women’s Studies (now, Gender Studies and Women’s Studies) and Spanish, propelling her towards law school, which she would begin at the City University in London, UK. And seventeen years later, she wears her swipe card at work on a Western lanyard.

Caines-Best now works as a Senior Legal Counsel for the Argus Group in Bermuda, where she provides legal advice and strategic support to her business partners in the various entities within the Group. Getting to this point required persistent discipline. “That’s the beauty of a legal career,” notes Caines-Best. “It’s something that takes time, and going to Law school is hard work. It’s a journey that doesn’t happen overnight.”

After finishing high school in Bermuda, Caines-Best settled on pursuing her higher education in Canada, applying to a variety of schools across Canada. Settling on Western University, she left Bermuda with the intent to pursue a degree in Political Science and French. Yet, when she sat in Alumni Hall with 300 other first year students all studying political science, she realized that perhaps this was not the program for her. She had enrolled in courses in Spanish and Women’s Studies, which she thoroughly enjoyed. Once she discovered she could pursue Women Studies and Spanish as a degree, she knew it was the most natural fit. “There wasn’t any magic or rhyme or reason to it,” says Caines-Best. “I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the classes. I enjoyed my classmates, some of whom I still speak with today.”

Aside from enjoying her major, Caines-Best recognized that Women’s Studies and Spanish would help better prepare her for her end goal of attending Law school. “Women’s Studies, by virtue of it being



interdisciplinary, causes you to look at many different areas of study. I recall studying courses in psychology, and religion, and anthropology, and sociology.” She noted that Women’s Studies helped her grasp and distill information, communicate concepts and issues, reach reasoned conclusions, and make cogent arguments. Additionally, Women’s Studies works in identifying structural and systemic injustices. “That’s essentially why I went into Law, because of justice, and my Arts degree was really good preparation for me.” Similarly, Spanish was also used in her practice when communicating with clients who speak the language, and ensuring they understand their rights.

Looking back, Caines-Best appreciates the value of her Arts degree. “Arts degrees are a great foundation for law school or policy work, because your mind is trained to look at situations analytically. And in a world where diversity of thought is celebrated, there’s no reason why diverse perspectives can’t be or shouldn’t be in the legal field. Because organizations want that diversity of perspective and thought.” Aside from the academic side of Western, Caines-Best appreciated the friends and connections she

made at Western. She was heavily involved in a variety of clubs and associations on campus, including the Caribbean Students' Organization, the Black Students' Association, and Campus for Christ, and is still in close contact with some former members today. "Value the time you have at Western and be intentional about it," she says. "I know it's easy to be sitting in the library late at night studying for exams, but that ends and then you get thrust into the real world. My friends and I would often reminisce and say: 'Those were the best years of our lives!'"

Caines-Best completed her law degree in the UK, followed by a vocational course to either qualify as a barrister (a lawyer who advocates for clients in court) or a solicitor (a corporate lawyer). After qualifying as a barrister, she began her career, in Bermuda, as a litigation lawyer, wherein she had to complete a pupillage (or articling) before being called to the Bermuda Bar. Caines-Best was also called to the Bar of England and Wales but is currently not practicing there. Caines-Best recalls the

phenomenal lawyer she was partnered with as an articling student, a woman who had been practicing for many years by the time Caines-Best started in 2010. "I was really intentional about choosing female mentors," she says. "I wanted to see how a professional woman balances work and personal life. Seeing that has really helped me, so without a doubt my pupil mentor was a massive influence on my career."

Caines-Best eventually returned to Bermuda to begin her law career. After spending so many years away from home, she felt a pull to return. As she reflects upon her life now versus as a law student or Western undergrad, she feels she has found a balance between work and personal life. "I think there's always this tension, especially as a woman, between personal and professional commitments and feeling like you're never giving enough attention to any area. But for me, I like to think of balance more holistically and recognizing that my definition of balance has evolved."

Now married, Caines-Best is focused on being a present parent for her young daughter, and ensuring she comes into her own while providing her opportunities to do that. Professionally, she seeks to continue learning in her career. "The beauty about Law is that you always remain in a learning posture," she notes. "Because the law is so vast that you can always learn new things. As for me, I just want to continue to learn as areas of the law evolve and develop and the regulatory and legal landscape maybe evolves and changes."

She encourages all prospective Arts students interested in Law to remember your why. "There are a lot of people who go into Law, whether it's to serve their community, or to address miscarriages of injustice, or to be a strategic business partner. The why keeps you going forward because you will have those hard days where you ask, 'why am I doing this?' But just remembering that *why* can be the motivation needed."



## AUTHOR REFLECTION

From the moment we started chatting on Zoom, I knew this was going to be a most rewarding and densely informative conversation. Kimberley shared the highs and lows of her Western experience, her dream to become a lawyer, and the dedication and perseverance she had (and still has) in moving to new places for new experiences and to have the education that best suites her talents. Hearing how she was able to leverage skills from her Arts degree in law school and beyond made me feel comforted by the fact that an Arts degree can really take you places if you play your cards right and use the opportunities given to you—and never stop reaching for that end goal.

*Michelle Sadorsky is a fourth year student in the Honours Specialization in English Literature and Creative Writing. Passionate in graphic design, she hopes to make a career in the marketing world beyond graduation.*

# THE POWER OF WORDS

## HEATHER BISHOP

BY KATE ARMSTRONG

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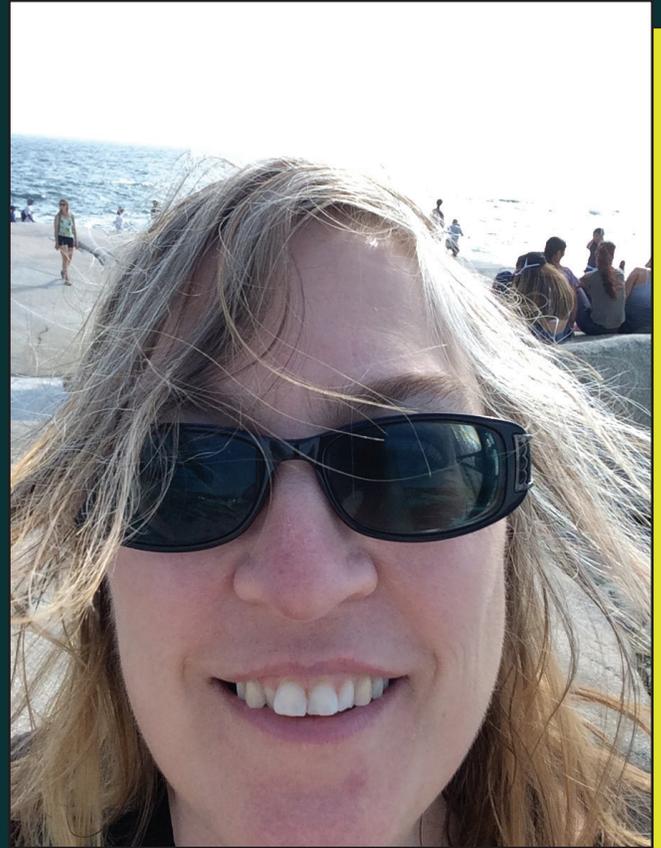
What is the best way to change the world? According to Heather Bishop, BA '90, we each carry with us the profound power of our words, and we have the opportunity to change worlds with them everyday.

“When you study [English], you realize your words do matter...not just through the books that we read and what is written down, but what we say to each other in any given moment,” Bishop explains. It was her love of words and reading (and a lack of multiple choice exams!) that led Bishop to choose English at Western.

And a correct choice this was. Bishop loved her time studying English. The small class sizes, emphasis on critical thinking, and ability to discuss ideas with her classmates made her undergraduate career a success.

Although her office is not on main campus, the Western Stewardship and Donor Relations Officer is amazed by the ways campus has changed since she was a student. “I like the fact that main campus is very student focused,” she says. The green spaces and the lack of busses hurtling down the street between the University Community Center and Stevenson Hall are big pluses for the student body, in Bishop’s eyes. Though the removal of the tunnel connecting Physics and Astronomy to Middlesex College does make winter at Western seem much more daunting!

In her role as a Stewardship and Donor Relations Officer, Bishop is responsible for communicating with donors to help them “understand the impacts of their gifts,” which range from 1.5 or 3 million dollar endowments to a specific department or program. Here, she puts her English degree to use through the creation of compelling stories in her reports. She helps donors understand how their generosity is making an impact on the lives of students in a practical, positive way.



While she certainly excels in her career, it is clear that Bishop’s additional work with the Middlesex branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is where her caring and effervescent personality shines through. CMHA operates with the goal of “supporting [the] community through mental health and addictions,” a cause that hits home with Bishop. She began her work with CMHA more than a decade ago when her child, originally diagnosed with bipolar disorder at age seven, moved from the child and adolescent to the adult mental health system. “It was really tough to find assistance at that time,” Bishop says. “We consider ourselves very lucky.”

Bishop’s work on the board of CMHA provides her with a creative outlet where she exercises her emotional intelligence. She works to ensure that the needs of vulnerable communities are being met and can help make effective changes to day-to-day operations. She notes that her professional life greatly complements her volunteer work, as it gives her “the mental space” for her work with CMHA. When asked about her most prized achievement, Bishop cites her work with CMHA—particularly during the 2021

merger of Addiction Services of Thames Valley with the Elgin, Middlesex, and Oxford branches of CMHA. Now serving all of Thames Valley, they offer a phone support line, a crisis line, case management, housing services, addiction clinics, and more. “[It’s] pretty amazing to see all those people come together and create something like that,” Bishop says. With so many people coming together for a common goal of community safety and wellbeing, she is hopeful about the progress being made, though she says there is still a ways to go before every individual has the support they need. She cites initiatives like Care Hubs during Western’s O-Week as steps in the right direction. Bishop doesn’t underestimate the power of the individual to make large changes. As an undergraduate student, she considered taking on a graduate program popular among Arts and Humanities students—Law. Like many young people, Bishop aspired to change the world. She realized, though, that “there were probably easier ways to change the world than try to take on the Supreme Court.” Still, it is evident that she is immensely passionate about her work with CMHA and improving the

quality of the lives around her; she finds value in helping even just one person— “that one person’s perspective, it could be that that person is the one that’s going to change the world.”

Bishop’s foundation in English proved to her the value of language. “Our words do matter,” Bishop asserts, emphasizing not only the impact words can have on us, but the impact our words can have on others. We each have the power to change someone else’s day, week, month, or entire perspective. Being intentional with words is key, according to Bishop. We have to “understand the weight of words... in a positive way, but also in a negative way.” The goal is to find the balance between the two.

Bishop’s biggest piece of advice for university students? “Take advantage of every opportunity you have,” she says. Bishop knows well the value of taking these opportunities, having been involved in theatre both on and off campus. This involvement led her to work at the Phoenix Theatre in Edmonton, her first professional foray into marketing and promotions, starting the path that ultimately brought her home to Western. Community

is essential, she affirms. There are hundreds of clubs and organizations to get involved in at Western, and you’ll never know if they’re right for you until you try.

Looking back on her time at Western, Bishop says there’s not much she would change. English has served her as a figurative “Swiss Army knife” throughout her life, and her time spent volunteering and getting involved on campus aided in developing a sense of community and a kinship with Western that she holds to this day. If nothing else, she reminds us that “if we don’t reach out and be a part of the community, then we’re not living in the community.”



## AUTHOR REFLECTION

My interview with Heather was a sincere, enlightening conversation that I will carry with me throughout my life. Maybe we spent an abnormal amount of our time discussing the tunnels on campus, (only to discover we’d unknowingly passed one another in one on the way to our meeting!) but that didn’t take away from our deeper conversations about the meaning of life and the sociology of technology. Without knowing it, Heather’s work with CHMA has already touched my life as a soph during O-Week, which certainly goes to show how our actions can change others’ worlds. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to speak with Heather, and hope everyone appreciates her wisdom just as much as I do!

*Kate Armstrong is a second year student in the School for Advanced Studies in the Arts & Humanities and Sociology. She is excited to see where the future takes her, and to continue doing cool things like writing for Spotlight.*

**“HAVING AN ARTS &  
HUMANITIES DEGREE  
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TOPICS THAT  
INTEREST YOU.”**

LAURA CURTIS FERRERA,  
BA '93

**“YOUR  
WORDS  
DO  
MATTER.”**

HEATHER BISHOP,  
BA '90

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**WANT TO SHARE YOUR WESTERN ARTS & HUMANITIES STORY?  
CONTACT JESSICA SCHAGERL: [jschage@uwo.ca](mailto:jschage@uwo.ca)**

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