



the Reckoner

of Marc Garneau C.I.

FEBRUARY 2021

SORRY
— WE ARE —
CLOSED

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NEWS BOARD

A board to keep the student body informed about their school and local community.

Talking to Taira: an Interview with the President

by JACQUELINE HUO



As 2020 drew to a close, MGCI welcomed its new Student Activity Council (SAC). The Reckoner sat down with SAC President Taira Mehta to discuss her plans for the upcoming year.

Taira obtained her position by default, as she was the only candidate to run for President. She said that the main reason she wanted to run was that she “loved the idea of being able to guide the council in such unprecedented times.” She continued to say, “I want to make sure that 2021, for everyone in this school, is something that we look back on and love. I think that especially in a time and period like high school where people are trying to figure themselves out, if you throw COVID in there, people have a really hard time connecting with each other. So that’s the job of the student council, to help connect people and make them feel like they’re a part of something larger than just themselves, part of a school community.”

Taira’s presidency itself is also unprecedented: she is the first Grade 11

student to ever serve in this position. Despite being younger than previous presidents, Taira is confident that she has the abilities required for the role. “I don’t think my age has anything to do with my competency, I also have the ability to figure things out quickly. My experience on student council outshines the fact that I’m in Grade 11,” she said.

Her experience on SAC can speak for itself. During the 2019-2020 school year, Taira served as the Social Convenor and was responsible for organizing our Winter Wonderland dance. She had also hoped to introduce grade lounges, but her plans were cut short due to the pandemic. Since our SAC elections were delayed until December, she was also part of the interim council last as the Spirit and Social Convenor. In this role, she hosted spirit events including Among Us tournaments and a gratitude initiative on Instagram.

In terms of how she plans to lead, Taira said that, “a lot of people think that student council is some sort of hierarchy, but I like to think of it differently. I like to think that I basically am an assistant there to inspire innovation and new ideas based on the visions that the rest of my council have, and I’m there to accommodate that.” She aims to focus on change and innovation, and is encouraging her fellow SAC members to try out all their craziest ideas.

They’ve already started to make changes by creating junior and senior roles in the place of single positions. Taira hopes this will allow

younger students to have more of a voice on SAC, which has been historically dominated by older students.

One of Taira’s proposed initiatives is online mental health spaces, where students can relax, spend time with their friends, and in her words, “vibe to music”. She hopes to hold social events such as games nights and movie nights. SAC is also working on connecting with small businesses to supply school merchandise for Marc Garneau.

All events will be online this year, so expanding outreach is a major concern for Taira. She wants to make sure that SAC is able to communicate with the student body to inform them about the events that are taking place, as well as initiatives such as sweater sales. She encourages students to follow the SAC Instagram @mgci.sac to stay informed.

SAC meets weekly using Zoom, and will be posting meeting minutes and agendas once all positions have been selected. Taira anticipates that their work will be very fast-paced in order to make up for the time that was lost due to the election delays. She emphasized that her biggest goal is to not let COVID impact our spirit as a community.

Finally, Taira had a message for all students, an excerpt from her campaign speech which was never released: “Even though quarantine is changing our lives, it doesn’t necessarily have to be for the worse. In fact I want you to give me the chance to make this the best year possible. It’s true that this past year has been insane, but I think it’s time to take back the memories and experiences that quarantine has stripped from us. As your SAC President, I’d be honoured if you let me make that a reality for our school. Stay safe Garneau. I can’t wait to make great memories.” ■



Discovering Debating in Debate Club's Discord

by AMY JIA

What do models, POIs, table banging, case construction, and whipping have in common?

Here's a hint: it's not fashion, math, table misuse, architecture, or foamy cream. Rather, they are all elements of debate. Chances are, these words have been uttered multiple times in the Debate Club Discord server during their meetings on Mondays, Tuesdays, or Wednesdays. Members attend on different days, depending on their cohorts.

Marc Garneau's Debate Club was founded in 2018 by Grade 12 student Akil Miki Huang when he wanted to build up a robust debate team for MGCI. When asked about what inspired him to start the debate club, he said, "Talking with debaters at other institutions, I realized that we were behind on training and club opportunities. A couple friends and I decided we would set up a club, starting small and working our way up."

Contrary to the infamous televised debates, high school debate is civil, educational, and fun to watch. Students learn to think critically and analytically. They are encouraged to debate a wide scope of topics that range from regretting social norms to types of activism and even whether or not the opposition side has already won the debate. Through the numerous lessons and practice debates, club members have an opportunity to hone their skills of idea organization, collaboration, efficient note-taking, and public speaking. Furthermore, Debate Club is a community and a safety net for members

to bond and feel supported.

As the president of the club, Akil said, "Our priorities at debate club are centered around the construction of a community at Garneau! Of course we value the oratorical skills and argument-building that debate often helps with, but we try to create a strong community bond and I offer whatever help I can—regardless of whether they're debate-related or not—to our members."

Debate Club meetings typically consist of lessons on new skills and practice rounds. Motions have ranged from those extracted out of recent high-school tournaments to fun, unique motions on challenging topics with unexpected formatting. Lessons teach important skills and techniques used in debate, such as argumentation, refutation, speech structuring, and more. Despite the argumentative nature of debate, Debate Club has a comfortable environment that encourages friendship and community. Debate Club member Lisa Zhang stated, "I wanted to join the club for a more laid back experience. I just enjoy being able to debate with friends and do interesting motions that I don't always get in debate class."

The experience of club members also varies, as everyone, regardless of skill level, is welcome in the club. Because levels range from new novice to seasoned se-

niors, Debate Club sorts members into "junior" and "senior" categories. Some people have joined to learn about debate with their schoolmates, while others use this opportunity for extra practice, like Carrie Jiang: "I joined debate club because I just started doing debate in the summer and I wanted to develop my skills within the school club, sort of like extra practice."

The Debate Club also sends several members to represent MGCI at tournaments. This year, tournaments are run online on a discord server. Most tournaments take place over a span of one-to-two days with multiple rounds each day, along with "break" rounds—the semifinals, finals, and junior finals. These tournaments include Upper Canada College's Pro-Am tournament, and coming up in 2021, two of Toronto's highly well-known high-school tournaments: Hart House HS 2021 and Western University's 2021 high school debate tournament.

Regarding the near future and coming years, Vice President Larissa Long said, "Honestly, I just want MGCI debate to remain an open and inclusive club where anyone can join and come to learn, make new friends, and joke around. I love the atmosphere that this year's debate club has fostered, and looking at how far we've come in these past few years is astounding." ■



Food For Families: Food Banks During COVID-19

by RENA LIU

Despite the numerous challenges of COVID-19, food banks around Toronto remain open to serve families in need. However, just like the communities they assist, food banks have also had to adapt to the pandemic. Many food banks, such as Flemingdon Park Food Bank and Community Share Food Bank, which was established in 2004, operate under reduced hours or have had to handle distribution with fewer volunteers.

“One of the biggest changes is that we’ve had to hire a part-time food program manager to oversee our operation,” said Dorothy Boothroyd, one of the Co-Chairs of the Community Share Food Bank, which operates out of the Church of Ascension in the Don Mills area.

Before the pandemic, the food bank was managed by over one hundred volunteers who worked in rotations. Given current restrictions, only about thirty volunteers are available to work on a rotating basis. Volunteers wear masks while on duty, and wash their hands and change gloves frequently. Food is distributed behind plexiglass in pre-packed bags of perishable and non-perishable items. Furthermore, clients in need of food must make appointments through phone or email before arriving at the food bank. Distribution hours have been reduced to Wednesdays instead of Tuesdays and Saturdays.

Moreover, Community Share Food Bank, which operates under the umbrella organization North York Harvest, has had to roll back many of its programs due to the pandemic, including its popular nutritious breakfast program, which provided healthy food and opportunities to socialize.

Although need may be increasing in other areas of the city, Ms. Boothroyd said the demand for food has remained mostly static in the catchment area of the Community Share Food Bank. However, there is an in-

crease in the number of food deliveries made to families. Before the pandemic, the food bank delivered food to approximately ten families each week, but now it delivers food to more than thirty-five families each week in collaboration with Better Living, which runs a Meals on Wheels program.



Illustration: Colleen Chang

When asked about the qualifications needed to obtain food, Ms. Boothroyd said, “There’s only one qualification, and that’s that you live within the catchment area.” There had been additional requirements based on financial criteria three to four years ago, but “nobody comes to a food bank who doesn’t need to be here,” she said. However, if a client resides outside of the catchment area, they will still receive food, but will be referred to the food bank in their area.

Due to the pandemic, Community Share Food Bank has not run any food drives, but it has been running a successful ‘no-food’ food drive by accepting monetary donations through its website. The donated funds are used to purchase produce, milk, and eggs to enhance what is regularly received from North York Harvest and Second Harvest for families in need. The food bank has a strict healthy food policy that strives to procure

perishable and non-perishable items composed of non-processed foods, low in sodium and sugar. Although the food bank does accept donations of healthy food at this time, it must be contacted in advance and food donations must be isolated for ten days before they can be distributed.

Apart from donations of food or money, raising awareness about food banks and the need for food banks is important for food banks to continue operating. Students had previously volunteered at Community Share Food Bank, but under these circumstances, no student volunteers are allowed.

Furthermore, Ms. Boothroyd suggested other resources for youth, adults, and seniors, including Kids Help Phone [1], Toronto Seniors Help Line [2], What’s Up? [3], and a guide to coping during COVID-19 from North York General Hospital [4].

“Stay hopeful. We have to obey municipal, provincial, and federal guidelines to stay safe. If we work together, we can get through this,” Ms. Boothroyd concluded. “Continue to reach out to people via Zoom and other platforms. Try to laugh, get exercise, stay as well-nourished as your circumstances allow, and avail yourself of food banks as necessary.” ■

Resources

- [1] <https://kidshelpphone.ca/>
- [2] <https://torontoseniorshelpline.ca/>
- [3] <http://whatsupwalkinclinic.ca>
- [4] <https://mentalhealthcovid19.ca/>

To learn more about Community Share Food Bank, visit <https://www.communitysharefoodbank.ca/>.

Flemingdon Food Bank (<https://www.fcfoodbank.com/>) distributes food on Mondays and Wednesdays, and operates under the umbrella organization Daily Bread Food Bank. Registering at <https://dailybread.link2feed.ca/> gives weekly access to a food bank that is part of the Daily Bread Food Bank.

For more community resources and support, visit <https://211central.ca/> to receive information on organizations serving specific locations in the Greater Toronto Area.

LIFE BOARD

A board for imaginative self-expression through written and visual content.

So They Forgot.

by SARAH LI

My fingers faded into twinkling starlight, abandonment pricked at the skin and ate away my flesh.

There was yet still light in the sky of our home. My eyes, that mortals once peered upon and bowed to, dulled with the last of our rule.

"How could they forget us?" my sister roared. Her skin crackled, splintered and peeled.

The bright mass of light beneath shone out from golden ruptures that pierced the dullness.

"Let go of your anger, dear sister of mine," I soothed with a silky voice.

"It was only a matter of time.

The mortals are foolish, they drink and dance and war, and forget about all things that are important in the world."

How could they forget the sun and the moon? Cruel were the strings of fate, a mummer's farce played by powers much too great. Do they who rule eternities untold see us as their puppets and toys? Or were we all temporary, souls confined to lower dimensions, time a roaring canal to us, mere droplets to them?

A second ticked by. Another fragment of my power faded, like a thread of old yarn slowly falling apart in a dusty drawer.

"I will not stand," My sister announced, "To be thrown aside like a useless dog.

"I will remind them so they may not forget."

And she glowed then, hair of magma and skin of obsidian, the brilliance of her light crowding space and time.

"There will be lands, on each of their planets,

"Where I will hold power so to keep them in place.

"Those who visit, who are to set their eyes upon that glory of my making,

"Will return to me, my fiery embrace,

"Dalavea, their beginning."

Her will broke across the dams of time, and shot into their Worlds as spades do through wood. Quakes of celestial magnitudes shook them like lifeboats tumbling in storms, but only for a moment as that timeline was gone.

"If you will rebel, then I may as well,

"For wherever you go I am destined to follow.

"And whatever is yours shall be mine too."

The black crept up my hands and swallowed my arms, ink so dark no light escaped, against skin so pale the moon hid in disgrace.

"There will be creatures, wondering their skies,

"Space will flow vast and empty between them, to be lit up by lonely rocks and spinning stars."

"When they dare to step outside and venture into the unknown,

"My beasts will devour them and return them to me,"

"Lan, their end."

And out from me, my creation erupted, coiling their bodies and swimming in nothing. They hungrily devoured stars and planets for the very first time,

mortal eyes watched helplessly as their world blinked dark, but only for a moment as that timeline, too, was gone.

My sister and I held our hands and danced across our dominion. The day and the night, light and dark, life and death. Bountiful harvests and destitute homes, framed family photos and little skeletons in the ground.

The third orbital, bound by the wills of the sixth. How ironic, and how tragic. One step away from the serenity of infinity, from an eternity of power. A distance that we will never close.

Let the lower orbitals, the fifth and the sixth, see what they can do, against us, the primal forces beyond their rule. Two, three, six, eleven, numbers the mortals do not understand but are ours to command.

"How I wish they could see," my sister laughed,

Her skin finally flooded by the burning inside.

"One last ballad to the songs of yore!"

"And we will be here, my sister." I sang,

The dark in me flowed towards the wordless void.

"Until the end of days." ■



Illustration: Max Lu and Akshaya Varakunan

stardust

by ABBINAYA PARAKARAN

Photograph: Justin Wei

i hold
a galaxy between
my palms

the heat makes my
rings melt
and the black holes
suckle at my fingertips
and lap up the molten silver
that runs through the
crevices of my hands

extraordinary stars and planets
shine through the void
of the foggy edges
each a slightly different
color, unique,
and the hues blur and blend
together as i trace lines between
constellations with my eyes

i watch as the stars implode
and meteors streak

through the ethereal
leaving a flowing trail
that cools the orb i hold
like an ice cube dropped into
a steaming cup of tea

and all i am left with
is a stinging cheek,
fingers tipped with blue
and for a moment
the world is at peace

Suitor

by SUMEDH DHANVANTHRY

Bright white metal, grainy smooth blight that flits down like helicopter seeds. Everybody inside their homes, talking with the sound off. Walking yourself home down the warm street when nobody else knows. A purplish stomach inside you, lightening with unease. It's making you so angry that you can't describe it just right.

Let the city unveil itself to you, the suitor. A rusting synth plays seventh chords that coat your dusty eyes as you walk. Inhale the richness around you, the deepening of humors, until the nighttime clouds sag and barely brush your head of hair.

And in an instant, let yourself be reversed as your experience resolves to singularity. Feel the dryness and cleanliness of the road. Feel weaker. A tough dark man holds you upright until he doesn't. No sharp rocks to provoke your backside; there are only the smooth and sultry voices of crickets and cicadas in their treehouses. Cheering screeching baritones are fluted across the city like rains and sands, dropping dead on those awake. They engage a cotton-mouthed driver seething under shallow red light. The city in heat may seem noiseless. But when noticed, the insect tones find a way to creep into the mind, through the nose and breath. The driver's hands are yellow from cigarettes.

Sure, you learned the sacrifices that this kind of love demands. You decided never again, but it's apparently not up to you. You wondered then, and now I wonder how I'll see it in 20 years.



Photograph: Justin Wei

The insect tones pollute and make impure the foreign fluid in the mouth of a non-identity youth, cooling on the low porch. A drained male shatters an ice tray into the sink to soak his skin. He ungratefully internalizes this as self-soothing. In the horizon, hear the thunder of game, hooves pounding the city into a kaleidoscopic habitat. It's one for festivities, so note the ivory trumpets sounding off.

They'll call you that, not knowing

what it suggests, and forget soon that they ever said it. Inhale and clear your throat.

Come face-to-face—let yourself—with the shifting and course-correction of silences. The colours and moods of the soundlessness flutter, though its physical intensity is unchanging. Why, then, does she feel such blaring discordance? The question, unanswered, dissolves. The surface of the asphalt sends purple sparks—a lilac—into your fresh brown soles, and up through your heart and tongue.

Looking through the fine wire mesh on the door, see his shirt on the floor, see a hand press the wall, watch them play pick-up ball. He lays upright in late midnight hours with glassy eyes to make sense of silver and darkening lilac. The road smells of vanilla and rubber; they think, "I haven't been out this late since I was little." Haven't, since the kinship was minced. The newest and worst hormones on the cul-de-sac, tearing friends apart. Like that time you got your wheel stuck in a manhole cover and you fell and tore up the palms of your hands. Played ball bloody.

Let that night's life trickle down like dream-physics into a want for cars and bloodied hands and long eyelashes.

I wish you could steal the view through their eyes.

Bare your dull full radiant face. ■



misaligned
Maryam Mobashir

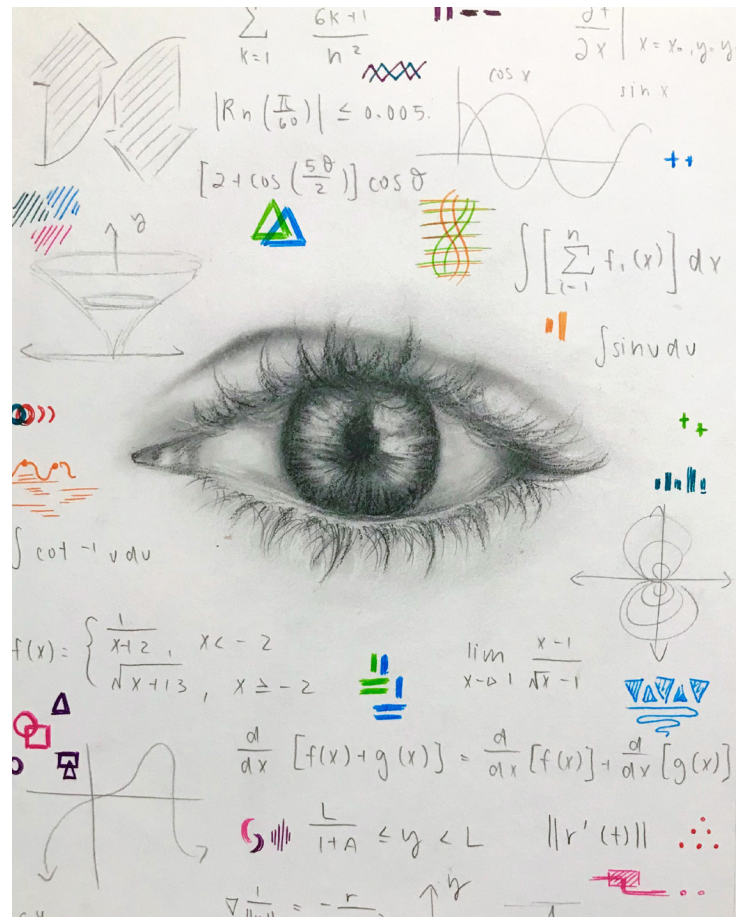
Serenity
Lucy Qi





Freefall
Fatima Gulab

A New Lens
Sophie Yang



Skates, Seals, and Social Awkwardness

by MAGGIE PANG

It's a rather cold day. Indeed, it's only been five or so minutes and my toes are no longer sending signals to my brain other than "cold cold cold." The sun shining through the window before I left tricked me into thinking it would be warm, but thankfully, I have a rather large, brightly coloured hat. It makes 5'7" me look like a child, but that's perfectly fine, since it gives me an excuse to act like a child. My laces are slightly too tight for comfort, since I dislike when the two skates do not have equal tightness, and one cannot really tell the difference if they're both too tight.

After a little bit of shuffling towards the ice, with a little bit of hesitation, I step onto the ice. The Zamboni had just made its rounds around the rink, and there were already a couple people speeding around in circles, making lines on the pristine ice. I, however, require a bit of adjusting, and wobble around for a few seconds. Unsure if I still know how to skate, I take a few shaky, penguin-like strides before gaining more confidence, forgetting that newly zambonied ice is slippery, and falling.



Illustration: Helen Sun

First fall of the year, I suppose. I would sit there and continue to pity myself, but the ice, surprisingly enough, is icy, and I need not torture myself like that. More

people are sitting on the benches, lacing up their skates, so I try my best to fully enjoy one lap before the influx of people arrive.

There are a few different types of people on the ice. I notice that there are quite a few little kids today. They may look very innocent, but they are in fact very dangerous. When they fall, they have a tendency to slide across the ice directly in front of you like colourful seals, forcing you to stop, which is indeed something I am morbidly bad at. Also, the second they spot a gap in a group of people, no matter how small, they will make an attempt to fit through it and pass them at full speed, all the while scaring the people they are trying to pass with their loud scrappy skate noises, confidently swinging limbs, and a vertical deficiency that makes them rather hard to see.

Another lap later, I encounter another challenge—a group of teenagers. This is very bad news because they are teenagers, so not only must one face the challenges of trying to—without going close enough to them to be considered creepy—bypass a very slow-moving group of people literally perfectly blocking the path, but one must also avert one's eyes so as not to attract the attention of their judging stares. I finally manage to escape once the path widens.

Eventually, as the sky grew darker, the number of people on the ice dwindled to the point where I could find myself with several meters of empty ice in front of me. My toes at this point are essentially non-existent and the wind is blowing more confidently against my face. Above, the moon shines as I skate along to the "Beatles Only Radio" blasting from the speakers. ■

Sketchbook

by ZIXUAN XU

my thoughts flow like rushing rivers out of my feelings and into the waters jet black ink on a crisp white page something they'll never understand

i dream of future and i dream of life beyond this cycle, with blessed meaning but it's all monochrome, just sketches not a droplet of sparkling coloured joy

i'm missing a ripped page and a half of not only my mind but also my heart should I make it my purpose to find it or is it destiny, for it to only burn?

but no matter how many unfinished no matter how many merely attempted

i close each drawing in my bruised fist and hold them close, eyes welled with tears

every memory is recorded by my hand rough and hazy in its fading glory it'll all likely never be fully complete but nevertheless, they remain on the paper



Illustration: Elizabeth Wei

It's been a while since I last watched the birds take flight.

by FATIMA SHARIPOVA

Last week I learned I wasn't doing so well in my classes this semester. Two weeks before that I learned I wouldn't be visiting my family for reading week. I can't remember the last time I looked outside my window, or went outside just for the sake of it.

I watch the birds walk around, occasionally hopping elsewhere to switch spots. They squawk at one another. Could they be giving orders? Could they be rehearsing for their great act?

I didn't learn I wasn't doing so well in my classes this semester. I knew all along. It's not difficult to know when you're not doing so good. I didn't learn I wouldn't be visiting my family for reading week. I never intended to.

The sky is white. It should be beautiful, heavenly even, but really it's awfully cloudy.

Of all the days I decide to leave the house, I choose the day the sun is MIA.

Maybe I should work harder. Study more, sleep less. Make time for a social life. I really want something to point to, to fix, that would make it go away.

A small blue opening forms. The sun's peeking out at the birds.

The sun peeks out at me. Maybe I should call some friends, catch up with them.



Photograph: Amy Jia

Ask Alex for a storytime of her latest adventures. Call my sister, see how she's doing in highschool. Maybe give her some advice on college applications.

The blues got larger, and less blue. It's more yellow. I wonder how the sky goes from blue to yellow without first turning green. Maybe she just knows green's not her color.

Maybe I should go home before it gets dark. But it's been a while since I last watched the sky turn blue to yellow, and yellow to orange to red to purple to blue again, but darker.

I'll start working out. I'll clean my whole house, make it feel like a fresh start. I'll even take—

A mass of birds lift from their places in a graceful, almost rehearsed movement. They join their comrades in the sky. They move as one, swooshing down and then up again, and away.

Did they practice for that? Spend hours finding out who

goes where and who leads the flight, squawking at one another to just stop being so slow?

They're a dotted V against the marigold sky. And they keep going forward, away from my spot on the edge of the cliff, and I can imagine them flying as one, through marigold fields and poppy fields and fields you can't identify because it's just too dark.

Do you think they're born with it? Gracefulness, knowing exactly where you belong?

They've got their destination at heart, like they'll know it when they see it.

I don't think they can be confused, or clumsy, or worried, or tense. They're not human.

It has been a while since I last watched the birds take flight.

Where should I go next? ■

EDITORIAL BOARD

A board that amplifies student voices through supported opinions.

Should Transgender Teens Require Parental Permission to Transition?

by JEFFERSON CHEN and MAGGIE PANG

Last month, a B.C. court ruled in favour of a 17 year old's mother who filed a lawsuit after she discovered that her child was planning on undergoing a mastectomy—a surgery that removes breast tissue—and was already obtaining prescription testosterone without the mother's permission. The mother has made repeated statements that her child was caught up in a “fad,” and went on to state that what “anxiety-ridden girls really need is psychiatric care.” On 5 November 2020, one day before the scheduled operation, Justice Shelley C. Fitzpatrick granted an injunction preventing Dr. Daniel McKee from performing surgery or even providing counsel to the teenager [1].

The vast majority of parents want the best for their children, making it quite understandable for a parent to be unsure whether or not an irreversible surgery with lifelong consequences is right for their child. However, it is just as understandable for a person to want to feel more comfortable with their body, which is why parents absolutely need to educate themselves about gender identity to truly do what's best for their child.

Contrary to belief, being transgender is not just a “fad” that will go away. It's very unlikely this particular teenager woke up one morning, decided they didn't like their gender, and decided they wanted to undergo a major, life-changing surgery. Whether one likes it or not, gender affects so many aspects of one's life - from appearance, to how one is expected to behave socially, to how other people think of a particular person. No one would casually change something that is such a large part of their life. People often take years, even decades, to figure out where they lie on the gender spectrum. In fact, in B.C., at least one assessment and letter of recommendation from a qualified professional is required to perform any gender reassignment surgery [2]. During the assessment, a number of things are thoroughly evaluated, including whether or not the patient has gender dysphoria, whether or not they are in a good state of mind, and what effects surgery would have on their mental health to ensure that the transition is as smooth as possible.

It's been said and proven on many occasions and by numer-

ous professionals that teenagers are more impulsive and make decisions more spontaneously than people of other age groups [3]. However, it would be wrong to assume that adolescents have poor decision-making skills with respect to every choice they make, and to dismiss said choices. Many say that teenagers who seem to suddenly decide they are transgender are only being impulsive, without realizing that they have probably been considering this for years. Chances are they are secretive with their identity out of fear of people's reactions, as is the case with anyone coming out to reveal their non-normative identity. Then, when they finally decide to take action after years of secretly questioning, they're accused of being misled by the media and not knowing themselves. While they may be told these things out of concern, it mostly comes across as invalidating their identity.

Not only that, but denying people the right to transition can be detrimental to their mental health, no matter how old they are. The problems often start when they realize they feel stuck in their bodies. They then worsen when people assume their desire to transition is an impulsive decision resulting from their mental health problems, which were in fact a result of their desire, and inability, to transition. A survey done by The Trevor Project

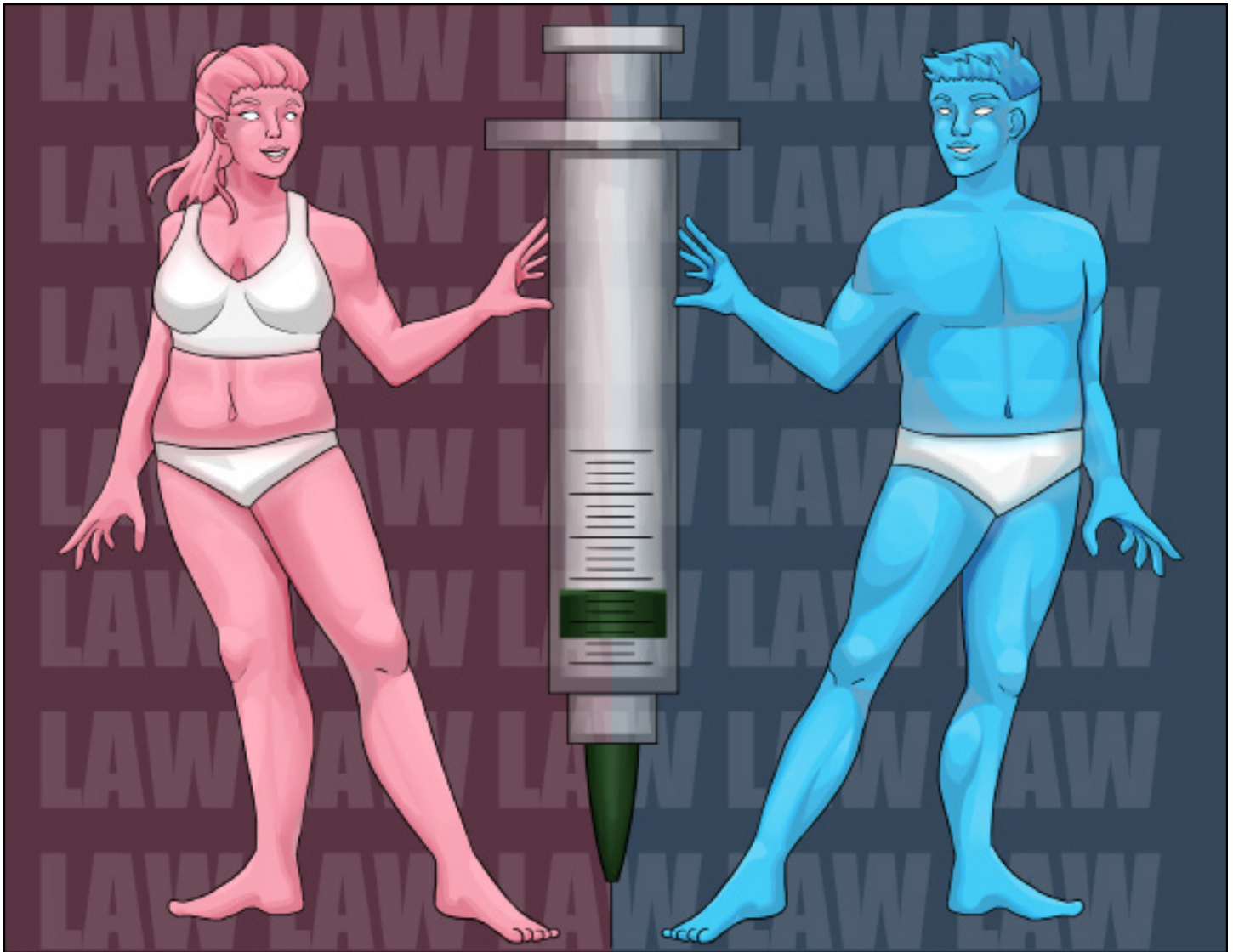


Illustration: Sarah Li

showed that more than half of transgender respondents seriously considered suicide at some point in their lives [4]. This rate is concerningly high, and denying them the right to be comfortable with such a large part of their identity, all because their parents think they know their children better than their children know themselves, is not helping the situation. On the other hand, studies find that the vast majority of transgender people are much happier after transitioning [5].

Last but not least, the more people progress through puberty, the harder it is for them to transition. As their body develops,

the more they look like a gender that they do not identify as, and therefore, the more they may be exposed to gender dysphoria, harassment, and discrimination. Many surgeries are best done before the body is fully developed, including mastectomies, which may cause significant scarring if done on mature breasts [6].

Overall, it should be up to teenagers and qualified professionals to decide whether or not to undergo gender reassignment surgery. Teenagers still have so many years of youth, and they deserve to live them happily, without being obstructed by whatever view the outside world has of them. ■

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The Grammy Awards Never Fail to Disappoint

by MAGGIE PANG

The internet is going crazy over the Grammys. Again. For those of you who don't already know, Canadian artist Abel M. Tesfaye, better known by his stage name The Weeknd, did not receive a single Grammy nomination this year. Not one. Despite "Blinding Lights" having set a record for most weeks spent in the top 10 of the Billboard Top 100 Chart [1] and his album "After Hours" setting a record for the most pre-adds on Apple Music [2].

The R&B singer turned to Twitter shortly after the nominations were revealed, saying, "The Grammys remain corrupt" [3]. While it may seem like he is simply being a sore loser, he makes a good point. The Album of the Year category went against everyone's expectations by not having "After Hours" nominated, which was one of the best selling albums of the year [4]. Sure, popularity does not decide something's worthiness of being nominated, but the Grammy Awards proved they do not make decisions based on talent either by choosing "Yummy"—which has got to be one of the worst songs I have ever heard in my life with a boring melody and oh-so-romantic lyrics like "you got that yummy yum, that yummy yum, that yummy yum" and "she's a bona fide stallion"—over "Blinding Lights".

It's not just that I have anything against "Yummy" particularly; it is, in terms of music theory, quite bland with its repetition, in terms of reviews by critics [5] and the internet [6][7], complete and total trash, and in terms of popularity, made it onto the Billboard Top 100 solely because of constant, shameless, and pretty much desperate promotion [8][9].

Every single year, we complainers and nitpickers find a justified reason to be upset with the Grammys.

So why do we even pay attention to them in the first place? Why do they even exist? Can the Grammys please just be cancelled?

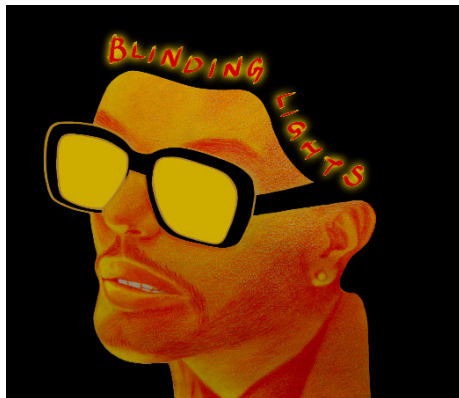


Illustration: Julia Shen

Each contest tends to have a defined thing they're looking for. The People's Choice Awards and Billboard Music Awards are based on popularity among voters. An award might be awarded to music a committee decides shows the most artistry and technical skill, or perhaps to music that dominated the year's charts. One might say that the purpose of the Grammys is to honour and recognize the achievements of the greatest artists of the year. But what does that even mean? It certainly doesn't have anything to do with statistics or technical skill, and it's based entirely on the opinions of a select group of a few thousand individuals working in the music industry [10]. It should also be noted that many of these individuals work for certain companies and might have certain interests that would make them biased—there have been many allegations in the past of corruption and bribery [11][12], along with racism [13] and sexism [14]. Therefore, it's not quite recognizing anything, other than music a bunch of music professionals like.

Indeed, the Grammys are incredibly bad at recognizing achievement in essentially any genre other than pop. Despite the widespread pop-

ularity of rap, only two rap albums have won the Album of the Year award, the last time being in 2004, and no rap song has ever won Song of the Year or Record of the Year. It should also be noted that some genres will, due to their relative lack of popularity, have committee members without much expertise voting for them.

A lack of a Grammy doesn't make Diana Ross and Queen any less legendary and the voting process is so untransparent and untrustworthy that the possession of a Grammy doesn't mean anything either. Overall, the Grammys could not be more irrelevant and incapable of recognizing music achievement in a diverse assortment of genres. ■

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Snowden: Vindicated by History

GUEST SUBMISSION
by ANTHONY CHEN

In June 2013, yet another mysterious three-letter organisation entered our collective consciousness. Unlike other famous organisations like the CIA, FBI, KGB, and CDC, the National Security Agency (NSA)'s sudden prominence was not due to movie directors looking for a quick buck. Instead, it became a household name after contractor Edward Snowden leaked classified information on mass surveillance programs to the world on the front pages of *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post* [1]. So who was Edward Snowden, what did he do, and why should we care now?

We live in a society. This means that although we have certain inherent rights and freedoms, reasonable restrictions sometimes need to be placed on them—hate speech laws, building codes, and speed limits are good examples of this. Furthermore, most people believe that the restrictions need to be proportionate, and normal people going about their daily lives should not be troubled by them. However, it was generally accepted by those working for the NSA—the US's digital surveillance agency—that covert, indiscriminate, oversight-less, Orwellian mass surveillance was justified. Mass surveillance of not just US citizens, but the entire world [2].

Looking at his initial career choice, most people wouldn't expect Snowden to later be branded as a traitor. He was a young, patriotic special forces trainee who left the army only after both his legs were broken. He then signed on with the CIA as a computer specialist but resigned shortly after because of moral objections. After that, he worked as a contractor for the NSA through Dell. There he conducted

research on China's mass surveillance, but soon became concerned that the US was engaging in the same behaviour on a much larger scale. Around this time, he began to raise concerns through official channels—concerns that went completely unheard. He then began downloading files, determined to reveal the NSA's actions to the world [3].

In March 2013, James Clapper, who was in charge of overseeing the NSA, testified under oath that the NSA did not collect any data at all from Americans [4]. For Snowden, this was the last straw. He immediately quit his job at Dell and found another consulting job, where he could gather more evidence to expose the NSA. Two months later, he was on a plane to Hong Kong under the pretext of getting medical treatment. There, he met with several experienced journalists he had previously contacted over the internet, and fled to Russia shortly after [3]. The subsequent revelations, as we now know, were unprecedented.

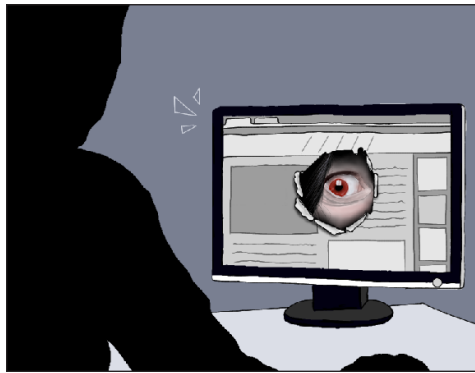


Illustration: Emily Lai

The world now knows that overstating the extent of the NSA's snooping is near-impossible. Through a combination of international partners (primarily Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom), willingly co-operating companies, court orders, and hacking, the NSA collects all types of communications, industrial secrets, financial information, location information, internet ac-

tivity—everything. Even though you would expect Americans to be the primary targets of American surveillance agencies, foreign citizens were targeted en masse due to their lack of protection under the US Constitution—in some countries, every phone call was recorded. Americans, Canadians, activists, companies, governments—no one was immune [5][6]. In a leaked document, the NSA listed its goals to “Collect it All,” “Process it All,” “Exploit it All,” “Partner it All,” “Sniff it All,” and eventually to “Know it All” [7].

On top of it all, the NSA had also developed numerous hacking tools to help them illegally break into systems, and a search engine called XKeyscore that allowed them to browse through someone's entire digital presence—every analyst had the power to use or misuse this [8]. Some parts of the surveillance were legal—enabled by the infamous PATRIOT Act—and some were of questionable legality, but the vast majority of it was unquestionably illegal, unconstitutional, and in violation of international law [5][15]. The most important part was that it was unknown and unaccountable to the public. The only provisions for oversight were James Clapper—who we have already met above—and a rubber-stamp court that approved over 99% of requests [9]. Surely government officials would have thanked Snowden for doing his duty to “support and defend the Constitution”?

It's often necessary to break an unjust law to bring attention to an issue and eventually create change—people in history who have done this include Oskar Schindler, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Even though they were initially controversial, we now recognise that they were completely justified and wonder why none of their contemporaries did the same. We have a moral duty to refuse to obey unjust laws, as well as to speak out when we discover

abuses of power—whether by the government or some other authority. Unlike other NSA employees who felt they should be above the law or were intimidated into silence, Snowden spoke out at great personal risk to himself.

And it's important to stress the full extent of the risk—the first charges brought against him carried a combined prison sentence of thirty years, and more charges were expected. He would be on the run from the most powerful country and intelligence agencies on the planet. In an anonymous interview, many powerful government officials fantasized about personally murdering him [12]. He expressed it best himself, saying “Everyone in the Intelligence Community is aware of what happens to people who report concerns about unlawful but authorized operations” [13]. We may not all have spoken out under the same circumstances, but we can support Edward Snowden and recognise him for what he is—definitely not a traitor, but a hero to all of us.

Snowden has many critics, but many of the arguments against what he did purposely misrepresent the facts or are based on misconceptions. The most common argument is that he should return to the US and stand trial; that the justice system is just, and he should plead his case to a judge and jury. This argument overlooks the fact that he is charged under the Espionage Act, a relic from history that effectively stops the accused from defending themselves—in previous cases, whistleblowers were not allowed to explain their rationale or to mention the word “whistleblowing” [11].

Another argument is that the documents he took were not limited to those about mass surveillance, and Snowden intended to deliver the documents to Russia. He did take documents unrelated to mass surveillance, but he needed them to prove his credibility—

without them, he would just be another conspiracy theorist. Additionally, only a few documents related to mass surveillance have been released after being checked over by journalists—the remaining ones are safely encrypted. The final common argument is that the information Snowden leaked harmed national security and helped terrorists—the US Congress was kind enough to release a report with twenty-one examples of how the information harmed national security, but they were all blacked out [14]. As for the terrorists, the NSA could only cite one example that was later found to be unrelated by a judge [15].

After the revelations, there were protests and petitions—including many in Canada—demanding governments end illegal mass surveillance and cut ties with the NSA. World governments—including Canada—took swift action. Specifically, they legalised the surveillance after the public attention had died down [16]. Here in Canada, Bill C-51 gave CSIS (our intelligence agency) sweeping new powers [17].

Canadians often take pride in Canada's [objective] superiority to America. It's tempting to dismiss the NSA as an American problem and trust our government to respect our privacy. The truth is far more unsettling. The Canadian equivalent to the NSA is called the CSE, and it has even less oversight than the NSA—it's regularly found to be violating our rights, and also helps the NSA around the world [18]. The Bill C-51 that I mentioned above was the Canadian equivalent to the PATRIOT Act, trading away our rights for “national security” [17].

But it doesn't have to be this way. We live in a democratic society, and there are countless ways we can fight back against the ongoing erosion of our rights. Write an email—or a letter that can't be intercepted—to your Member of

Parliament [19]. Find and attend protests against mass surveillance. Learn how to protect your digital privacy [20]. Support charities like the Electronic Frontier Foundation and the Canadian Civil Liberties Association. Learn about where the political parties stand on these issues and vote when you're able to. Above all, stay informed about the issues that affect us all—through *The Reckoner*. ■

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