



THE MEMOIR BANK

BREATHING HOLES

The Story. Of You.

By LISA GREGOIRE / Illustration ROBERT CARTER

WHEN I WAS IN IQALUIT last spring, I went back to the apartment where it happened—the suicide, the assault. It took about a week to work

up to that visit. I had spent hours ahead of time walking along the beach and on plush tundra with a 20-year-old playlist in my ears, sometimes crying, sometimes playing air drums to Green Day. I was looking for things to pick apart. Ghostbusting. It was spring and light all night; I didn't sleep much. The courthouse and the RCMP station had moved to new buildings. I found no spirits there. It's funny. I thought I could go to Iqaluit and—as if firing up some cosmic identity collider—synthesize the incompatible parts of me. Lots of things I had expected to happen just didn't.

I eventually found myself at the Iqaluit House apartments one Saturday afternoon. I snuck in on the heels of a tenant and spent an hour stalking the halls, heart beating out of my chest like a backseat woofer. I dragged my fingertips along dingy walls and sat in stairwells trying to breathe. Twenty years on, it smelled the same. Is that even possible? After walking past it many times, I stopped at my old apartment, put my left ear to the door, and listened. I raised my fist to knock but couldn't. There I was, knuckles poised an inch from the wood for so long that eventually it felt easier to stay still than break the pose. What would I say if someone answered?



Seven years earlier, I was near the top of the world in Canada's most northern community. One night I took an ass-flattening snowmobile ride over rutted sea ice to a magical place between Ellesmere and Devon islands. There's a spot there on the frozen Arctic Ocean that is frequently open water, even in winter. Polynyas, as they're called, result from prevailing warm currents. A pod of belugas had come to feast.

Nothing is certain in the North, however. The polynya was freezing over, and the liquid highway back to Baffin Bay was now solid ice. It was too far for the belugas to swim in one breath, and so they were tethered to a breathing hole about two metres long and a half metre wide—and shrinking by the hour.

Everyone in Grise Fiord had been talking about the entrapment. A local family decided to go see for themselves, maybe harvest a whale, and they invited a few visitors, including me, to join them on a frigid, two-hour voyage into the sunlit spring night. It was kind of them because we were soft southerners who would likely complain about the cold, and did. But they were generous and patient, maybe because they knew that a favour given is one owed, and that's important in a place like this.

We were keen to take pictures to brag about later. Our Inuit companions were hungry for *muktuk*, beluga skin—Inuit sushi. We juggled cameras and frozen batteries with mittened fists. They prepared guns and harpoons methodically, with bare hands. We jumped up and down in comically oversized boots to keep blood flowing to our stiff feet. They sat and smoked, sharpened knives, spoke in Inuktitut and glanced at us, bemused.

At one point, we were all standing around the indigo pool. It was 3 a.m. and light as noon, silent but for the blip and bloop of water licking ice. Ten minutes passed. Blip-blip. Bloop. Then we saw them: pale bodies undulating like mermaids.

The pool erupted in bubbles and jostling and spray. We lost count of how many there were. The older white whales were breaching into the brittle edges of the ice to keep the aperture from closing. One had claw marks from a polar bear down the length of its body. They were pushing and gasping, blowholes clenching and wheezing, the tiny space churning in an orgy of desperate, communal respiration. I was overcome. I found myself also gasping, heart racing, panic rising in my chest, tears forming. When the whales dove down again and disappeared, I turned away to collect myself and thought, *Yeah, exactly: Sometimes it's hard just to breathe here.*

THE NEWSPAPERS

Before unlocking the café, I lift the newspapers off the curb and hug them

to my chest like they are the first children born today. They smell like the final lumps of grey snow in April, the undersides of semi trailers—they smell like 5AM. 5AM smells like hugging them while locking myself inside a café that doesn't open for another half hour. I roll their rubber bands off, stack them on wire racks, brew coffee, unwrap and arrange banana bread, lemon loaf, shift from foot to foot testing balance and consciousness. I love these brief moments with the blueberry muffins, the coffee grinder clearing its throat, before anyone enters demanding coffee. On my break, I'll twist the rubber bands onto my rubber band ball, working its diameter above two inches and wonder how early the postal worker wakes to throw the day's news at our door, if she too delights in her work, the grey bundles of papers arcing through pre-dawn dark, their cold thump onto the curb.

—Kayla Czaga

THIS PAST JUNE, I MET A woman at the Iqaluit women's shelter. She told me stories, none of them pleasant. She mostly talked;

I mostly listened. Here are some things she said: In the beginning, he was very nice, romantic even. He once put his hand down her pants to search for evidence of infidelity. "Love has patience, love is blind," she said. "I saw his potential." One night, after he almost killed her, she waited until he passed out, and she escaped. "He'll finish me off if I let him."

As she spoke, it felt as if the room was shrinking. I fought the urge to break a window, bust open the door. I thought, how could our stories overlap like that? And also, what happened to the air in here?

But then she said other things that made it clear we were different.

As an infant, she was abandoned, outdoors, in a garbage can. Someone heard her crying and saved her. A man raped her when she was nine. Afterward, he gave her \$20 to shut her up. When she was 15, she was married off to a man twice her age. Within a year, she gave birth to her first of 11 children. One time, after her marriage ended, a man had cut her so badly on the head that she needed 15 stitches. He called her from jail and told her she'd better lie in court. She did; she told the judge she couldn't remember anything.

We spoke for an hour and were so drained in the end that we just held each other and cried for a long time, she clutching me and moaning as though grieving a death and me, as always, shifting into reporter mode—detaching, contextualizing. Abandoned in a garbage can? Who was I kidding? I grew up loved. I'm a tourist here, slumming. Poor little white girl. Get over it.

It was the same thing I'd told myself 20 years ago.

IN 1994, WHEN I WAS 26, I moved to Iqaluit to work for the weekly *Nunatsiaq News* as Canada was giving birth to a new territory. It was pre-Internet,

when phones were attached to walls, and hashtag still meant number sign, and fax machines were miraculous but annoying because of the screechy dial-up sound. Weather permitting, the newspaper was delivered every Friday by plane from the South, where it was printed. We used to wait for the news.

I'm an experience junkie, which is good for a reporter. I fancied myself a conduit through which complex things would be made plain. What better place to hone my skills than with a people rooted in oral culture and mostly ignored by mainstream media. Storytellers! Adventure! I'd find things out, I thought. I'd change people's minds. I'd make them angry or embarrassed, or at the very least, better informed. Young reporters tell themselves these things. A few old(er) reporters, too.

It wasn't quite Nunavut then. When I moved north, only 3,600 people lived in Iqaluit. It was half its current size and the capital of nothing—a mangy frontier town on the world's fifth-largest island in what was then the Northwest Territories, more than 2,000 kilometres from the centre of political power in Yellowknife. There was no music store in Iqaluit. No decent underwear for sale. No shawarma.

Nunatsiaq News was run out of a small green portable that's not there anymore. It was located at what is now called the Four Corners, Iqaluit's busiest intersection. In the early 1990s, there were fewer vehicles—most people

walked. Most people were Inuit or Caucasian. Most of the Inuit were there to live and work and raise families. Most of the whiteys were there to make money, ride snowmobiles and leave when they tired of the cold.

Each week I wrote half a dozen stories on everything from art to murder. There were frequent junkets and land claim meetings to attend across the territory. You could jump on a plane and find yourself in a dark, coastal town eating raw caribou and drinking strong tea on a cardboard-covered floor with generous strangers who spoke through their English-speaking children. You could invent yourself in a place like that.

I fell for a young Inuk who loved Patrick Roy. He gave me Roy's rookie card. I still have it. He was a single dad living with his mother, who shared the parenting. He was smart and funny, a handsome boy from a big family. He drank a lot, but then so did everyone around him. Booze orders would arrive at the house, and everyone would be happy until they weren't happy at all but angry instead, or sad. He was a jealous man. I was flattered at first because I mistook his jealousy for devotion. It progressed to accusations and rage, then tearful apologies and remorse. It stopped being flattering.

One night, I was sitting with him at the Royal Canadian Legion, a table of rum and cokes between us, watching the pinched look of disapproval overtake his face. I convinced him to leave before he got too drunk, and we returned to my apartment at Iqaluit House. Once there, he pulled the phone from the wall, started yelling, breaking dishes, throwing things. I don't remember everything clearly here. Memories get recorded in fragments during trauma. Your brain's too busy preparing your muscles to punch or run. I remember he was pushing or shaking me. My dress got ripped. I remember thinking, "Dammit, I really like this dress," and "Holy shit, I gotta get out of here." And then I heard "boom-boom-boom" on the door, and suddenly big cops were in the room because the neighbours must have called. I remember feeling enormous relief, and I remember handcuffs and glass on the floor, and I remember being trapped in a corner in bare feet.

I wonder what he remembers.

Then I was at the police station, chain-smoking and writing a statement. I remember feeling hyper-sensitive, like a hare near a predator. Everything was slow and supercharged. The scratch of pencil on paper was deafening. I remember the officer coming in to check on me. So kind he was. So safe I felt. He told me I was doing the right thing, but I didn't understand what he meant. And then he asked me a question that might have saved my life, because everything changed after that.

“Has this ever happened before?”

“Yes.”

“You want to tell me about it?”

“OK.”

Week after week, I wrote stories about how Inuit society had been messed up by residential schools and pedophile priests and child sexual abuse and family violence and the Indian Act and how all the “Eskimos” were given government dog tags starting in the 1940s so Ottawa could track them and give them welfare. I wrote about rum and rape and racism, about southern laws suddenly imposed on the North and forced High Arctic relocations and the slaughter of Inuit sled dogs by RCMP in the 1950s and the European sealskin ban, which decimated entire communities. I wrote about a society upended, largely because of southerners, some of them good-intentioned but also arrogant, careless, poorly informed.

My boyfriend was a product of all this, I’d concluded. I would be sympathetic and forgiving. I’d fix him with love. The assumption that I could “fix” anything in a complex, ancient culture in transition was naïve and offensive and, in retrospect, made me guilty of the superiority I had shunned. I figured that out later, in therapy. This too: Maybe I felt like I deserved it. Southerners had scattered plenty of reckless disregard over the decades. Wasn’t it time someone with privilege suffered a little? Felt what it was like to be powerless?

Christ, for real? Did I think that? My therapist thinks I thought that. Deep down, I might have thought that.

Anyway, I was frying small potatoes compared to what so many women around me, all of them Inuit, had endured for years. My hockey mates showing up to games with black eyes. Me sitting in court hearing about a woman getting beaten or stabbed. My pain didn’t fit anywhere. I ignored it, and that worked for a while, until a cop sat me down in a police station where people take these things seriously by assigning them numbers from the Criminal Code.

When the officer asked that night if there had been other incidents, I told him about a time, four months earlier, when my boyfriend wanted to have sex with me in an apartment where I was house-sitting, but it had been a bad night, and I resisted, and he was astride me in bed, and he put his hands on my throat, and I couldn’t breathe or scream. I remember his tanned forearms. We struggled. I blacked out.

When I came to, he was on his side, turned away from me. I lay still, disoriented. Eventually, I slid off the bed, ran to the bathroom and locked the door. I looked at myself in the mirror and saw bruises pooling on my chest and

neck. I didn’t recognize the reflection—something weird about my eyes. The thing that makes me *me* wasn’t there. I felt eerily detached and weightless, and for a split second I thought: My God, maybe I’m not actually here. Maybe I’m dead.

What do you do with a memory like that, a near-death experience you blame, at least partly, on yourself? How do you reconcile a foolish girl with the one who replaced her? The one who you think is smarter than that. For years, I’d tried to knit those people together. There was her, and now there’s me, and they are not the same.

It’s not like I sat around idly contemplating my evolving identity. This is what happened: days, months, years. Some of them memorable, most of them not. I moved back south, worked for daily newspapers, got married, had twins, bought and sold houses and cars. Suddenly, a bunch of my life was behind me, including a person I’d left there. I didn’t acknowledge her because she was weak. Because I’m not. Because I’m ashamed of her.

Theo Fleury said shame is the glue that keeps you stuck. But eventually, your body rebels, tries to get unstuck. Like that time with the belugas. When I saw them gasping and the hole closing and the ocean’s deep darkness and the triggers of snow and tundra, a tiny projector started rolling in my head, silent but for the tickticktick-ticktick of film being drawn through knobs and levers and then coiling underneath where the take-up reel should be.

Truth is, I couldn’t forgive her. She broke the cardinal rule in journalism: She became the story. She was a reporter who should have been interviewing people, but instead, they were interviewing her, and she had her name attached to that familiar introduction: “On or about the twelfth day of February A.D. 1994 at or near the Town of Iqaluit . . .”

Truth is, I had to find a way to forgive her. I had to stop calling her *her* and start calling her me.

TWENTY YEARS LATER, now living in Ottawa, I ended up back at *Nunatsiaq News*. It was 2013, and I was writing and editing

stories about murder and sexual violence again. Some party gone awry. Some jealous revenge. Some adolescent raped while her mother was passed out. Some dead man face down in the snow. Spellcheck-headline-hyperlinks-upload-retweet-tsk-tsk. Nunavut Normal.

I regularly travelled north, and during one trip I saw him at the Northmart in Iqaluit. Walls started closing in. I followed at a distance, heart racing. Was it even him?

It didn’t matter. I had to get out before I threw up, so I set my basket down, marched out the door and walked around town for a long time. Months later, I saw his name on a court docket next to charges of incest, assault, sexual assault, uttering threats. The breathing holes were closing over again.

And then one night in Ottawa, I was hanging out with a *Nunatsiaq* colleague, having a few drinks, talking about the North. He was a young reporter in Iqaluit on a brief southern visit, and he was about the age I was when I lived there 20 years ago. He was curious and motivated. He liked writing about crime and politics. He reminded me of me. I decided on the spot that I needed to talk about what happened to me, and he was going to bear witness whether he wanted to or not. It all came out, in sobs and whispers. And it felt easy because he understood the context. I didn’t have to explain how embarrassing it had been for me, as a reporter and how typically Iqaluit. He got it.

There’s a part of the brain that handles speech, and it gets disabled when you’re threatened, making it so hard later to assign words to those events. The night I told my friend about my life in 1994 was the first time in almost two decades that I’d managed to form a verbal narrative. It was a such a relief. But then it was as if I’d poured water on dehydrated things. The memories plumped up. They didn’t recede back like normal memories do. They felt fresh. They demanded attention. Sometimes you don’t live your life so much as get yanked forward by it, in painful jerks. You can resist, which I did. And this is what happened.

I drank bourbon, which is expensive.

I invented something called “yoguit,” a combination of yoga and guitar. I did it consecutively, because the physical release of yoga often made me want to play guitar, but I eventually started to do it simultaneously because, well, think about it: Warrior two? High lunge? That’s classic open crotch, rock guitar stance. That’s Pete Townshend, folks. That’s Slash. It was an amusing and necessary distraction.

I exercised a lot, because it made me feel good and offset the bourbon and because you can fool yourself into equating physical with mental health and also because it made me feel in control.

I gave a wheelbarrow of money to an able psychologist, whose well-meaning receptionist always said, before I emptied the wheelbarrow, “Is there anything else I can do for you today?” I always wanted to say, “Hey, how about making this one on the house?” The therapy helped, but that’s because most of it was based on Buddhist principles, which I already knew.

And I had a revelation: I’d spent years telling other peo-

ple’s stories and ignoring my own. Maybe I could report on my own story.

MY MOTHER DIDN’T LIKE bugs. Her fears became my own. I had vowed not to pass on those irrational bug fears to my own

children, so when I was offered the opportunity to write interpretive panels for a museum exhibit on live creatures, I agreed. An enthusiastic entomologist put cockroaches and spiders on my palms, told me it was safe and distracted me with engaging facts while I tried not to flinch. When you examine something up close and look at the different parts, he said, it’s less scary.

I hatched a plan to dismantle my own past, to examine the dark parts and understand them, to figure out why I stayed with a man who nearly killed me. If I could do that, I thought, maybe I might forgive myself and start acting cocky again, as is my nature.

I ordered police reports and court documents. I tracked down people who knew me back then, and interviewed them. I went to Iqaluit and poked at thick scars. I listened to old songs from 1994 because music dislodges my emotions like a spade in the ground. I read through my old *Nunatsiaq* stories. I found photos of me in Iqaluit, 10 pounds heavier, with a perm and pleated teal corduroys. I was convinced it would work—the investigation, not the perm-and-cords combo.

I started by interviewing my old editor, Todd. We scheduled a phone call. I was nervous about what he might say and messaged my reporter friend online about it beforehand.

“Don’t know what to ask. I have too much to ask, right?” I wrote.

“There’s a lot,” he wrote back. “Just maybe let him tell you the story—of you.”

So I did. I’d forgotten half of it. Because people remember different things.

I would hang out at the Legion with a bunch of Inuit friends, he said. When he would suggest I adopt some discretion, considering I was a reporter in a small town, I would bust out an Irish accent and call him Father Phillips and tell him to save the sanctimony. To my chagrin, I remembered doing that.

Todd and I had lived together for a while in a two-bedroom apartment with his girlfriend. I asked him if he noticed me spiralling down. He said he knew my boyfriend was bad news, but he didn’t know how bad. I hid that part

of my life from him and our mutual friends, he told me. I eventually stopped talking about my relationship and, after I moved across the street to my own apartment in Iqaluit House, became even more estranged.

He told me about a time when, in a fit of suspicion and jealousy, my boyfriend had poured water onto Todd's computer and melted his Nintendo console with a lighter. Todd called the police, and the case got referred to a court diversion program. We had been writing about the new program and had been awaiting the first test case. Turned out, we were it. My boyfriend, accompanied by an elder, had come to our apartment. The elder spoke only Inuktitut, so my boyfriend had to interpret Todd's testimony to the elder and then the elder's responses back to Todd, which was ludicrous. Todd had to explain to the elder that his computer was an important tool for work.

"The elder was saying, 'OK, I understand, it was a tool,'" Todd told me. "So the elder reprimanded your boyfriend, who sheepishly put his head down and took a scolding in Inuktitut, which I didn't understand. And that was it." I felt compelled to apologize over the phone, but Todd told me not to feel bad. He said I had a kind heart, and that was part of the problem.

"You'd say afterwards, 'He was remorseful. He was crying.' You'd want to take him back. I remember now. You'd say he was like a little boy," Todd told me. "That's the whole psychology of people who are trapped in an abusive relationship; there's that period where the power shifts. And if you have a soft side, you're going to want to see the good in people."

CARLETON UNIVERSITY'S library has issues of *Numatsiaq News* going back to 1976. This past summer, I went for a visit. Classes had ended.

The library was deserted. I was alone in the basement with a stack of old memories on dry, brittle pages. The first thing I read was a two-part series on suicide that I had written. I remember how those stories came about. An Iqaluit RCMP officer had sat me in a room and let me examine police files from the 15 suicides in Iqaluit from the previous year. Police did that kind of thing for reporters back then. I'll never forget that afternoon: mournful suicide notes and photos of dead teenagers and guns.

My stories ran in consecutive issues. The night after the second story was published, I got choked unconscious at my friend's place in Iqaluit House—in the same apartment, it turned out, where a young man had removed his head with



CAN·ICONS WOMEN

In 1875, at Sackville's Mount Allison University, Grace Lockhart became the first woman in the British Empire to earn a university degree. In 2013, Alice Munro was the first resident Canadian to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. Between these two milestones, the road for Canadian women has been as long and tortuous as the Trans-Canada Highway.

Canadian women were legally recognized as "persons" in 1929 as a result of a petition by a group of Alberta women now known as The Famous Five. In 1976, this time in response to lobbying by 32 women's groups, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada made crucial recommendations on issues such as birth control, day care, equal pay for equal work, maternity leave, pensions, and part-time work.

Today, women hold leadership roles in every sector of Canadian society. Yet recently, the only Canadian woman ever to make it onto our banknotes was replaced with an icebreaker.

The dark side of Canadian women's history includes the 1989 tragedy now known as The Montreal Massacre, when a man shot and killed 14 female engineering students at École Polytechnique. The Canadian government set up the Panel on Violence Against Women, but the resulting gun registry has since been dismantled.

On average, every six days a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner. Any given day finds more than 3,300 Canadian women (along with their 3,000 children) forced to sleep in an emergency shelter to escape domestic violence.

In 2012, an ongoing protest movement called Idle No More was formed in part to demand an official inquiry into hundreds of Missing and Murdered aboriginal women. Idle No More is a grassroots movement founded and led by the First Nations, Inuit and Métis women of Canada—part of a proud Canadian history of women demanding justice for women.

—Clive Holden

a shotgun blast months earlier. When I had returned to that apartment to water my friend's plants—days after that story came out, with my bruises hidden beneath a turtleneck—it hit me. I was in the hallway, key in hand, when the police photo of the apartment door flashed in my mind, along with a photo of the bullet in the bedroom wall with hairs stuck to



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Photograph of Margaret Atwood by Jean Malek. All other photos by Adrien Guyot.



it. Once inside, I went straight to the bedroom. You could see that the walls were freshly painted.

After that gruesome coincidence, I remember feeling profoundly hopeless. Everything was mingling. One time, walking the frozen shore at night in 1994, I remember thinking: *I know where guns are. I know sheds that aren't locked.* You think those things when it's dark all the time.

Back at the library, I read another story I wrote in 1994 about a family violence workshop in which researchers said men who hurt their spouses are usually childhood victims or witnesses of physical or sexual trauma. Comparing the date of the story with my police files, I realized that two days after I covered that workshop, my partner was ripping my dress and police were pounding on my door. Life imitating work imitating life.

My self-examination included a chat with my dad. He's 84 now, retired from the Air Force, but his memory is vivid, and he likes telling stories; it runs in the family. He said he blamed himself for sending me his military documents, which allowed me to get a Legion membership and which clearly led to my "downfall." I reassured him my "downfall" was entirely self-written. He said he had worried about me, but he also remembers feeling discouraged for me because I'd worked so hard to get an education and become a journalist. For a working-class kid, the youngest of six who got all the attention, squandering your potential is almost unforgivable.

Then he told me about his brief military posting to Churchill, Manitoba, in 1956. My mother and my two sisters were in New Brunswick at the time, awaiting his return. He worked at a bar part time and would drink and gamble after hours, when the bar shut down. At one point, he owed some people a lot of money. When you're in an isolated place with no family or friends, he said, you do things you might not normally do. No one calls you out.

"There was a time when I was wondering, 'Who the hell am I? I'm not the same guy who was in New Brunswick with two nice little girls and a good wife. I'm up here in Churchill drinking, and I'm up here gambling.'"

He remembered going into his room one night and crying, so ashamed of what he'd become. He paid his debts, swore off gambling and left that life behind. "But some people don't," he said. "They linger there."

So, I thought, I'm not the only one who lost her way. But dad didn't linger there, and neither did I. All this time, I'd been berating myself for falling down when I should have celebrated standing back up. After I spoke with my dad, I realized that I didn't remember the standing up part.

THERE WERE TWO COURT proceedings in 1995. The first one dealt with the June assault, the second with the more serious event

four months prior. They both happened before Nunavut was established, so when I requested the records the court clerks had to locate typewritten files in NWT archives and scan them. They arrived by email in July 2015, almost exactly 20 years later. He'd pleaded guilty to the June assault and was sentenced to four months probation and 30 hours of community service. I remember none of it.

After poring over the pale photocopies in the second set of documents, a scene formed in my head that I recognized. I felt vindicated—I remember this one.

I was in a room. Neil Sharkey had come in. He's a Nunavut judge now, but back then he was a lawyer representing my boyfriend. We knew each other because I covered courts for the paper. He was gracious and swift, but it was still awkward. We didn't make eye contact much, but when we did, I sensed his concern. I thought, he's probably seen more important people in more uncomfortable situations. We were similar that way. We were privy to secrets because of our jobs.

Sharkey said my boyfriend would plead guilty to sexual assault if a forcible confinement charge was dropped. I agreed to the plea bargain because it meant not testifying in public. He got 90 days in the Baffin jail in Iqaluit, served intermittently from seven at night until seven the next morning, because he had a job, at a bank, which happened to be located in the building where I lived. I saw him daily, often on his way to or from jail. Soon after his sentence was up, I was gone.

I talked to my friend Shirley-Anne, with whom I lived immediately after leaving Iqaluit. I don't remember a lot about that time. I recently asked her what I'd been like back then. She said I was guarded and lived recklessly for a while—a lot of stumbling through the door late at night. She never saw me as weak, though. She thought I was fearless to a fault, wanting to live what other people lived to truly feel their experiences, and sometimes that got me into trouble. She said I never called myself a victim though she tried, at the time, to help me see that I was. I was too busy blaming myself for not recognizing harm and getting out of the way. Already distancing myself from *her*.

Earlier this year, I sought out my police statements. I wanted to see what I'd written at the time and to find out who the RCMP officer was so I could track him down and thank him for maybe saving my life and to tell him he fundamentally changed the way I thought about police officers.

It didn't work out.

"A search for records was conducted in Nunavut. Unfortunately, we were unable to locate records which respond to your request," came a letter from the RCMP last May. "It is likely that any RCMP record that may have existed has been purged."

Of course, that's likely. According to Statistics Canada, there were 2,713 assaults and 581 sexual assaults in 1994 alone in the Northwest Territories and roughly the same for each year until Nunavut split off in 1999. There would be nowhere to store all that paper.

Purged. Any record that may have existed has been purged.

There's a word in Inuktitut that is often said at the end of a conversation instead of goodbye: *taima*. It means that's all, there's no more. I had to tell myself just that. It was time to stop.

Buddhism teaches you not to cling to anything because everything is constantly changing. But we hold so firmly to our opinions, especially about ourselves. Some of us form a snapshot of who we are at a fixed point in time. We get used to that image because we've modified our memories to prove it and because familiar stories are comforting, even the ones that hurt. But we don't usually show other people that picture.

Truth is, *she* didn't make poor choices. *I* did. So what? And she stayed because she loved that guy. So did I.

Truth is, *I am* a privileged white girl. It still hurt.

ON MAY 30, 2015, IN IQUALUIT House, I was standing in front of my old apartment door, poised to knock. Why was I even there? Curious to see

what would happen, I guess. Exposure therapy. Face the fear and vanquish it.

I summoned and then discarded a dozen non-threatening opening lines designed to reassure a stranger in an awkward situation while endearing myself in a self-deprecating way so I could somehow insinuate myself into the entrance of the apartment and gain a view to the living room—and my old life.

I shook my head and loosened up. It's OK, I said to myself. I'm a reporter. I'll think of something.

And finally, *finally*, I forced myself to knock.

There was no one home.

Taima. ☒

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