

Summer: Has Anyone Seen My Heart?

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SEASONS OF LIFE

The Medicine Wheel, a symbol of peaceful interaction and connection among all living beings on Earth, lends itself to limitless interpretations and teachings. In Medicine Wheel tradition, time and space are circular, Sacred and Life are one. All power comes from Creator at the center of the unbroken circle. As days and seasons mark changes of time, there is an endless connection to past, present, and future. Four directions reach to embrace all people of Mother Earth, supported and united by healing energy. Dimensions of body, mind, heart, and spirit balance the journey of creation and the seasons of life.

My story takes an unexpected turn in Summer.

Has Anyone Seen My Heart?

The months from June Solstice to September Equinox in Canada are associated with warm sunny days and abundance. Warm South winds caress the earth with a spirit of caring, trusting the elements of sun and water to fulfill the promise of planted crops and tended herds. Grains are harvested for bread of the world, animals raised for meat and dairy while fruits and vegetables multiply. Summer is the season of manifestation and glory of life's fullest measure, a gathering of scattered events into meaning.



The daytime of our life is family, collective HEART is symbolized by Mother Earth. We learn integrity and honesty in relationships as we grow in love to become adults and parents. Summer celebrates passion, maturity, and emotional grounding. The spirit animal of Summer is the mouse, reminding us we must pay attention to small details. The mouse works hard and multiplies. Family is where we first hope to experience love, acceptance, and belonging.

Parenting, as many know, is often the greatest joy and biggest challenge we face. A tiny helpless infant is placed in our arms and we are given the task of supporting and guiding that child into adulthood. We all want our children to grow up free, healthy, strong, and independent. As we progress along that journey, we become painfully aware of our own limitations and realize sometimes love is not enough.

Summer is my most difficult season because it was Cara's last. Memories swirl around the black hole of her disintegration and disappearance, and the aftermath of her body discovered.



In Medicine Wheel tradition, Strong Sun Moon occurs at the time of summer solstice. It teaches heart connection, the importance of a strong home base as we develop and grow. Moon energy is intuitive and nurturing, balanced and loving.

June 21: **Strong Sun Moon - National Aboriginal Day**

1996: National Aboriginal Day was declared.

2004: Hikers discovered skeletal remains in ravine northeast of Wetaskiwin. The body was identified as **Lynn Minia Jackson**, age 34, mother of four. Lynn was from Saddle Lake First Nation near St. Paul and had attended college in Edmonton.

2007: Another body found near Wetaskiwin was identified as **Leanne Lori Benwell**, age 27, mother of two. Leanne was last seen in Edmonton on March 12, over three months earlier. Her hometown was Fort Smith, N.W.T.

Dear Cara,

Today is summer solstice, the longest day of summer in the northern hemisphere. Long before National Aboriginal Day was declared, today was Grandpa John's birthday.

Grandpa was a cowboy at heart, his work on the farm defined and shaped by his love of horses. He grew up the eldest son of homesteaders who broke their first fields with stoic oxen. Horses later became the preferred work companions and remained so for many years.

Early pictures show Grandpa and his siblings riding to school on horses and of horse-power pulling farm machinery. I remember a story of all the horses knowing their positions and waiting in place to be harnessed when big jobs required many teams pulling together.

As a child I fed the cows with my dad in winter from a sleigh piled high with straw and pulled by a trusty team. The feed area was a pasture valley partially protected by hills. A pump and trough were also set up there, and after forking all the straw onto the ground, Grandpa would chop a hole in the ice and pump until the trough was full and all the cows had a chance to drink.

Grandma used to say she knew when Grandpa was planning to work with his horses because he whistled when getting ready. He kept a working team long after they were required on the farm and annual sleigh rides became a favourite field trip for young students from town.

Hard work and camaraderie were part of the cowboy/farmer life. Grandpa often spoke of being a young man exhausted from work when he asked a neighbor, "How do you keep going?"

The man replied, “You need to stop and take a break and have a cup of tea and then you can go again.” Grandpa acknowledged, “I learned so much from him.”

Like his mother before him, Grandpa John spent the last few minutes of each day in prayer, kneeling beside his bed. Did he give thanks for the life he was given or ask for guidance in dealing with those he loved? It was probably a bit of both. He accepted “I guess God wants me to be an idiot before I die” in deference to his Alzheimer’s diagnosis.

June 22: Summer of barriers

1997: The *Edmonton Journal* featured the story of a “beautiful, sensitive girl,” **Jessica Marie Cardinal**, age 24, found strangled in an alley on June 13. She was a young woman who loved the blues and exercise, but sank into cocaine addiction from age 17 with repeated attempts to go straight. Jessica was remembered as a friend with boundless generosity and a steady smile.

I will never forget Jessica because I feared for your life at that time and phoned the police when I heard of a body being found. They were able to assure me it was not you before official identification was released.

2011: **Cindy Gladue**, age 36, mother of three girls, was found in a bathtub of blood at the Edmonton Yellowhead Inn. A man was acquitted of first-degree murder (2015) in a shocking decision that led to many community protests. The acquittal was thankfully overturned in 2017 with a new trial ordered. (See June 30.)

Dear Cara,

1994: You were nineteen and staying with your friend Aura when I moved to live with Will. You visited one evening and wanted to see pictures of your father. I had none of us together, but a few of you with him in his rare appearances as a hands-on dad.

No matter how much I console myself with platitudes, part of the reason I picked Chaos was because I thought he needed me. By fixing him, I didn’t need to focus on myself. Robin Norwood’s (1985) wonderful book, *Women Who Love Too Much: When you keep wishing and hoping he’ll change*, helped me understand what I had done but that was no consolation for you

twenty years later. The moral of the story for all young people is to choose very carefully if you want to be a parent. Some personality traits, for better or worse, have a genetic component.

A wake-up call for me that summer was official notice from my work to curtail your calls to the office. Needless to say I was embarrassed and disheartened to learn of you harassing reception staff. Often numb from my own daily upheavals, I sometimes forgot your behaviour was outside the experience or tolerance of most others.

Summer, naturally the season of growth and development, was a time of impediments and barriers for you. Because you lacked discernment in simple instructions, such as “call me at the office only in case of emergency,” I had to prohibit you from calling at all just as you were banned earlier from my office building. Will accepted the role of intermediary and agreed to handle calls in case of real emergency.

June 23: The fork in the road

“When you come to the fork in the road, take it.” Unknown

2017: *Edmonton Journal* headline: “Province looks to Establish Special Mental Health Court.” The proposal was to establish a system that will better consider the needs of the mentally ill and conditions such as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. That would have a refreshing intervention during the summer of your life. It is disheartening how much legalese swirls around people incapable of understanding – all in the name of justice.

Dear Cara,

1994: Still nineteen, you wore out your welcome that summer with Aura’s mom, Cinder. After you drifted a while, I helped you secure “independent” living in a small studio apartment suitable for students. You seemed reasonably happy at first, fashioning a make-up area on the study desk and taking pride in meal preparation. The Rolling Stones came to Edmonton in October. You attended their concert with a date while I could not afford tickets.

You briefly held a job at a cookie factory, referred by another friend, and tried in your own way. You cut pieces of foam from your mattress cover to stuff in your sneakers for long hours of standing and even found someone to drive you to work each morning.

However, my optimism was shattered when the kind immigrant lady who hired you phoned a couple weeks later to explain you were “emotionally unstable” and had to go. That was the end of my road, a turning point in accepting the reality I had been resisting – that you were in fact not employable at the time. The shift in focus was a sad relief. I’d done everything in my power to encourage and support you finding a job.

One sign of your pending psychosis was paranoia at the “fork in the road.” It was a billboard advertisement for fast food but you freaked out whenever you saw it, insisting it was a sinister message. Our family doctor provided a medical note saying you were “unfit to work for the foreseeable future.” That at least provided eligibility for financial assistance and you celebrated your 20th birthday in your little third-floor apartment. I made an extra key for myself so you did not have to come all the way downstairs to let me in when I buzzed.

June 24: Independent living gone awry

“We have every reason and excuse to evict you.”

Dear Cara,

1995: In spite of receiving financial assistance for rent, you did not manage well living alone. An early February note from your landlord titled “re your tenancy” reflected problems:

“Since the time you took up residence here on Sept 17, 1994, there have been numerous complaints about excessive noise coming from your suite. The Assistant Manager has shown remarkable patience and forbearance in his dealings with you. In spite of his quiet, polite, and patient attitude in the many times he had has to go up

to your suite and talk to you about screaming, banging doors, loud music, squabbling with other tenants and the like, you have persisted in this behaviour.

In the late evening of Feb 6/95 through negligence you flooded your bathroom and this caused moisture to drip into the suite below. (This was the second such incident.) Prior to that...you caused such a disturbance the police had to become involved... You appeared at the top of the entrance of the building where the police were, screaming, swearing and carrying a knife in a threatening manner.

We have every reason to evict you if we so desired. We are prepared to offer you one more chance. We propose to allow you to move into a suite at the basement level where we believe you will have a better chance of maintaining your self-control and where you are less likely to come into conflict with other tenants.”

It was quite obvious in retrospect that you needed more intervention than from a landlord. Yet you were engaging enough that he, like many people in your life, tried to help and give you further chances. I helped move your belongings downstairs. Unfortunately, this arrangement ultimately failed because, as I feared, the window provided too easy access for so-called friends to come and go. Neither was the flooding problem resolved, as evidenced by your squishy carpet whenever I came to visit.

June 25: Hospital intervention

1993: **Monica Marie Cardinal**, age 46, was last seen leaving a downtown Edmonton hotel with an unknown man. She was officially listed as missing four years later in February of 1997.

Dear Cara,

1995: Around the time of your “residency reprimand” letter, you were charged with assault in what I called the “liquor store incident.” You apparently caused such a commotion that four people held you down while waiting for police to arrive. You said you wanted to phone a friend for a ride home and didn’t realize you were only blocks from your apartment. Shortly after, you spent 51 days in Alberta Hospital for treatment of “drug-induced psychosis.”

During one of my many visits and meetings, your doctor explained a small percentage of the population ends up with schizophrenic conditions as a result of marijuana use. That certainly explained your recent regression. One visit ended abruptly when you started yelling and screaming. When you ran away later that evening, a certification order was issued.

You called me about 1:30 a.m. to say hello. I asked for your number and passed it on to the police. They'd woken me earlier looking for you, as if I would harbour you from medical care. They called later to let me know you were safe. In retrospect, that was probably the only time the police looked for you – or found you – or said you were safe.

A further meeting was held with a representative from the Public Guardian Office to discuss the possibility of guardianship. Like so many things, it was determined your eligibility was “borderline” and even with guardianship, there would be no extra resources. Surprisingly, you seemed to recover. On a weekend pass, we visited my parents' farm and you went riding all weekend. It was wonderful to see you alert and normal.

June 26: Independent living terminated

“Don't judge people for the choices they make when you don't know the options they had to choose from.”
Power of Positivity

Dear Cara,

1995: That spring, at age 20, you were discharged from hospital back to your basement apartment. You appeared in court for “assault,” your second charge ever, and chose to conduct your own defense. As mentioned, the alleged assault happened after you requested to use the phone in a store and became belligerent when asked to leave. The Prosecutor and Judge were appropriately compassionate and tolerant under the circumstances. You received 12 months of probation with a suspended sentence and a “no drugs” condition.

Three days later, I received a 4:30 a.m. call from your long-suffering landlord to say you were evicted because a so-called friend kicked in your window. I phoned your doctor who informed me that eviction was not grounds for readmission.

Later that evening another call was received from a nearby hospital where you were in Emergency after throwing yourself out of a moving car. Even that was not sufficient grounds for readmission so you were discharged again. I picked you up and we returned to your now well-ventilated apartment. You packed some clothing and I dropped you off at the home of your clueless friend, the one I called Dipstick, the fool who had broken your window. I never liked him but, at that point, thought you deserved each other. (See April 15.)

I returned to your apartment the next day before the arbitrary noon deadline. Sure enough, your landlord was ready to discard your belongings. Will and I managed to clear but not clean your area. I was beyond caring, especially when Mr. Landlord announced he had no intention of refunding partial rent even though it was still the first week of the month.

After two months with your questionable friends, you received a “communicating” (for the purpose of solicitation) charge. Dipstick and Patch probably goaded you for income.

June 27: Canadian Multiculturalism Day - What is a mother to do?

1995: The doctor was “extremely gloomy” about your future.

Dear Cara,

1995: You were placed back on anti-psychotic medication in November, still the summer of your life, but taken off again three weeks later because you were pregnant. Your 21st birthday was December 28 and you were admitted to Alberta Hospital January 8, 1996, for psychiatric care under a Mental Health certificate. Your admission summary described:

“A single woman with a history of borderline intelligence, longstanding behavioural problems, drug abuse, and a one to two year history of paranoid psychotic symptoms... Her anti-psychotic medications had been discontinued a few weeks earlier when it was discovered she was pregnant... Housing was a problem as she had been evicted from her previous accommodation... She had been living at the Women’s Emergency Shelter...”

It was also noted “her mother continued to support her in spite of the fact Cara is abusive and sometimes destructive to property...”

So life was not easy for either of us. At what point does a mother stop supporting her child? It felt like personal failure of utmost proportions that all I could offer in your disabled state was a temporary bed in a shelter for transient women. Was I supposed to leave you on the street? Waiting for what? Arrest? Death? Temporary out-reach from some church agency? While criticized for “over-involvement,” I was never offered more appropriate suggestions.

Your January 1996 admission resulted in a long and difficult hospitalization of 63 days. Will and I were in Thailand most of January that year with his work. Being half a world away, I was reassured to know you were in hospital rather than homeless. You declined my offer to ask Auntie Grace or Auntie Benevolent to visit, although you knew you could call them.

I pieced together your history after my return. You were held without medication until you agreed to the termination of your pregnancy, which happened February 2nd. You named the baby Jett, presumably after John Travolta’s son who born in 1992. You probably read the name in magazine. You were described as “very nervous but cooperative throughout the procedure.” However, you assaulted a staff member the week prior and criminal charges were laid. Chart notes reported you were “on verge of tears when police came – however expressed no regret.” It was disturbing enough that you were held without treatment; I was dumbfounded that hospital protocol deferred to law enforcement for behaviour management of a certified untreated patient.

After your so-called “procedure” you resumed anti-psychotic medication, your psychosis cleared and you were discharged, supposedly “at your request.” Again I was shocked that a responsible hospital would simply release a homeless psychiatric patient and was told “patients were not discharged to the street unless they came from the street.” You were simply dropped off by the hospital van in the heart of skid row.

The possibility of Public Guardianship was considered a grey area because two I.Q. points put you above the defined category of “dependent adult.” While it was true you could not care for yourself and were unable to make reasonable judgements, there was deemed no substantial benefit to mandatory care in terms of available supports and housing.

It was noted during discharge discussions that you never came out of your dependency, leaving me to pick up the pieces. My research found dependent personality to be a legitimate disorder, requiring long-term and consistent support. I would have gladly stepped back had there been some agency to take my place in providing and monitoring your care.

The other consequence of hospitalization was two charges of “assault” against hospital staff while under your committal order. The charges dragged on through several appearances over a year until, not surprisingly, both were stayed. This meant the legal process was finally halted, after me juggling my schedule many times to attend court with you.

June 28: Who is the victim?

“Prostitution is an extreme form of gender discrimination. Legalization of this violence to women restricts women’s freedom and citizenship rights. If women are allowed to become a legitimate commodity, they are consigned to second-class citizenship. Democracy is subverted.”

Donna Hughes, *Making the Harm Visible*,
quoted by Rachel Moran in *Paid For* (2013, p.205)

Dear little Cara,

Seasons of Life ~ Summer

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1996: You were discharged from hospital to the street in March. That same month your “communication” charge of August 1995 came to trial (seven months later.) The student legal lawyer defending you appropriately requested a report from your psychiatrist. Your doctor stated he was “extremely gloomy about your future...” and “a brief period of incarceration might be helpful” as you saw that as undesirable. The judge didn’t have a better idea so he sentenced you at age 21 to 30 days with a year of probation. You served 16 days.

It seemed I was the only person in court who considered the scenario incredibly bizarre. You, the defendant, were an emaciated young woman with documented borderline intelligence and a history of psychiatric illness. On the stand representing society was an older, considerably overweight, dare I say ugly, detective at least three times your size who had posed as a customer. Apparently it was acceptable for him to undercover as a creep for purposes of entrapment, although the thought that such a transaction might have occurred turns my stomach to this day.

The detective’s report indicated initial concern that you did not look well and may have needed medical attention but he decided to “bust” you instead. He testified when you declined to speak, he coaxed you to show with your fingers how many \$20 bills he would need for a “blow and a lay.” (Pardon me while I retch...)

I could not believe no other person saw the travesty and incongruence of such a sick situation. **An unkempt obnoxious man, albeit under-cover, was entitled to buy sex on the streets of Edmonton while an unhealthy, handicapped, and pimped young women was considered a threat from which he deserved protection?** The only law broken at the time, for which you were entrapped, was “communicating” in public.

Another detective later concurred that, although girls are usually not on the street by choice, it sometimes helps if the court system can deter them. Changes were long overdue.

June 29: Mental Health defers to court

“Just as ripples spread out when a single pebble is dropped into water, the actions of individuals can have far-reaching effects.”
Dalai Lama

Dear Cara,

1996: Your doctor optimistically added it would be helpful for your future management and care if Probation could determine your place of residence, require your attendance at appointments and ensure compliance with treatment as prescribed – as if that ever happened. Once again the medical system attempted to defer to court. It usually happened the other way around when some people are deemed “non-criminally responsible” due to mental illness.

Over the summer you were held in the Remand Center for 23 days, evicted from a sleazy hotel, stayed briefly at a Safe House, and were referred back to the Women’s Emergency shelter. Once again I helped secure accommodation, this time a room in a west Edmonton hotel.

Over the next seven weeks, I managed your budget. Rent and phone bills were paid and weekly shopping trips were subsidized. I provided a mini-fridge, kettle, and basic dishes. You took pride in keeping your room tidy, actively participated in shopping, and made reasonable choices given your life circumstances – cereal, milk, juice, fresh fruit, bagels, sandwich fixings, containers of pudding, cups of noodles, etc.

You made friends with a fellow down the hall with a hotplate in his room so were able to warm up chunky soup or canned spaghetti. These were supplemented by regular home suppers, care packages, and treats such as McDonald’s or Arby’s – not a great life for a mentally challenged citizen but adequate on an interim basis. This seemed to be the minimal support you required to maintain yourself “independently.” There are no words to express my frustration at the worker who thwarted that delicate balance by “holding” your cheque. That meant you did not receive financial assistance as expected so were unable to pay your rent.

June 30: Convolutions of the system

2008: **Chantel Brittany Robertson**, age 20, was found buried in a shallow grave in the backyard of a small Edmonton bungalow. She was last seen two days earlier when she was dropped off at a client's residence. A 24-year-old man was charged with first-degree murder. The Medical Examiner reported that Chantel was strangled.

2014: Little **Nathan O'Brien**, age 5, disappeared with his grandparents from their home in Calgary. His story is included because of the horror his mother felt when she went to pick him up the next day and found an empty blood-stained house.

2017: Alberta's Court of Appeal set aside the 2015 acquittal of Bradley Baron in the death of **Cindy Gladue** (June 22, 2011). The circumstances of the case are almost unspeakable. Cindy bled to death from a slashed vagina while the judge instructed the jury to consider there was no evidence that she had not agreed to rough sex or that the accused had intended to kill her.

The Appeal judgement ended with the words: "**This undermines equal justice under the law. The courts cannot permit this to go on. We must correct this. And we will.**" The ruling, ironically described as "extraordinary," will hopefully refine legal interpretation of sexual consent and spare women from disrespectful assumptions.

Dear Cara,

1996: Challenges of the summer, over and above helping you remain stable in your small hotel room, included preparing for various criminal charges. There was always a double test: (1) ensuring you were capable of attending and understanding proceedings on the day of appearance and (2) determining what your mental state had been at the time of alleged offense. The process was further complicated by long delays between appearances and no consistent time lines about which dates were for what charges.

As a point of interest, I tried to research the relative costs of care. Some information was readily forthcoming. For example, Alberta Hospital in Edmonton reported a per diem of \$372. This compared with an average \$68 a day for provincial institutions and almost \$78 for young offenders. Surprisingly, the local women's shelter, operated by a charitable foundation, refused to release their information, saying the per diem would fluctuate.

Your MONTHLY financial benefit from social assistance was \$220, of which \$115 was for rent and \$105 for what was called standard allowance – food, clothing, and personal needs. It was ludicrous to expect a single handicapped person to survive in society for a whole month on less than the cost of one day’s hospitalization – or three days in jail.

Although hospital protocol often pushes early discharge “to save costs,” inadequate attention given to patient resources after discharge creates further problems. The government seems oblivious that all money comes from the same source and that better community care could help prevent costly admissions.

Summer enters a new month, part of the learning and growing season. In traditional Indigenous communities, the right to mate and bear children is earned by young people learning to balance spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental health. This ensures the new family will never be hungry, will always have shelter, will be protected, and will stay connected to their culture.

July 1: Canada Day

“You’re not a true Canadian until you’ve apologized for saying sorry too much.”

Your Everyday Canadian

2017: Sample questions asked on a Canadian Citizenship test:

- (1) The name “Canada” comes from... “Kanata” the Huron-Iroquois word for village.
- (2) Six responsibilities of citizenship are ... obey the law, take responsibility for oneself and one’s family, help others in the community, vote in elections, serve on a jury, protect and enjoy our heritage and environment.

(Source *Edmonton Journal*, October 4, 2016)

My dear Cara,

Canada Day, a national holiday, celebrates the independence of our wonderful country in 1867. As extolled in our national anthem, Canadians take pride in our home and native land, the True North strong and free. Ironically, the word “native” is used to mean country of birth rather than home of the original First Nations.

2005: The ban on smoking, effective this date, was a remarkable example of how social education can shape and prompt legislative controls. Even though smoking is linked to many cancers and other diseases and most people know the dangers, the fact that so many still indulge indicates addiction is stronger than reason. Whether they appreciate it or not, smokers are beneficiaries of the new measures – not to mention all those now spared second-hand smoke!

It's hard to imagine a time when people smoked at their desks, in elevators and airplanes, even in hospitals and movie theatres. Now smokers are banished, tolerated in public only outside and away from building entrances. I would like to believe that if public attitudes about smoking can be so drastically altered, there is hope for more understanding about sexual exploitation. Victim blaming needs to stop and consumers must be held responsible for the harm they cause.

July 2: Sadness of vulnerability

“Can it be that in a world so full and busy, the loss of one weak creature makes a void in any heart, so wide and deep that nothing but the width and depth of eternity can fill.”

Charles Dickens (1812-1870)

2017: A cross was raised on Highway 16 near Prince Rupert in honour of **Alberta Williams**, age 24, whose body was found in 1989 three weeks after she disappeared August 25. Twenty-seven years later, her death was featured in an eight-part podcast, *Who Killed Alberta Williams*, launched by CBC news on October 25, 2016.

Dear Cara,

1996: Three weeks after your release from the Remand Centre in July, you faced a third “communicating” charge. This one dragged on for five months until December 1996 when you entered a guilty plea and received a 6 month suspended sentence with an area restriction.

In the meantime, my role was relegated to researching housing options with no success and ensuring you received Depo-Provera (birth control) injections every three months, with your

consent, to prevent a further pregnancy. You continued to accumulate new charges with brief stints of incarceration and learned to “do time” surprisingly well. I, in turn, found those times unexpectedly reassuring because at least I knew where you were.

Interestingly, the same psychiatrist who deferred your care to the court later took a well-publicized leave of absence. He said he was “tired, frustrated and very cynical about systems which seemed determined to add to the difficulties of an already difficult task.” Really? He was certainly not the only one who felt that way.

The hotel manager called to say he wanted you out because of too many visitors to your room. You chose to try the Edmonton Recovery Center aka “detox,” which I hoped might be a turning point in the right direction, but you did not stay long enough to continue to treatment.

2016: Your “running in traffic” charge puzzled me until one evening I drove through downtown with a friend. We slowed to avoid a young lady, obviously very high and literally running in traffic, staggering between cars with no apparent sense of direction. “Should we stop and try to help?” my friend asked. “No, unfortunately, there’s nothing we can do,” I sadly replied, “and it could be dangerous.” That lady too would have to wait, possibly for arrest, possibly injury and medical attention, possibility incarceration for a temporary reprieve.

July 3: Remembering our last visit

“No matter what happens, no matter how far you seem to be away from where you want to be, never stop believing that you will somehow make it. Have an unrelenting belief that things will work out, that the long road has a purpose, that the things that you desire may not happen today, but they will happen. Continue to persist and persevere.”

Brad Gast @ Magical Moon Witch

2015: **Sharon Ermineskin**, age 53, was found dead in her Maskwacis residence south of Edmonton. After a lengthy investigation, her son was charged in June 2017 with manslaughter and indignity to human remains.

My darling little Cara,

1996: You were charged with a further “breach” in November for being seen with track marks (evidence of injections) on your hands at the Kingsway Bar. You missed an appearance and a warrant was issued. You were arrested just after Christmas and charged with “failure to appear” and two more “breaches” for not keeping the peace and not abstaining. For that you received 30-day sentence in January 1997 and went to jail one last time. Auntie Benevolent visited you there in Fort Saskatchewan.

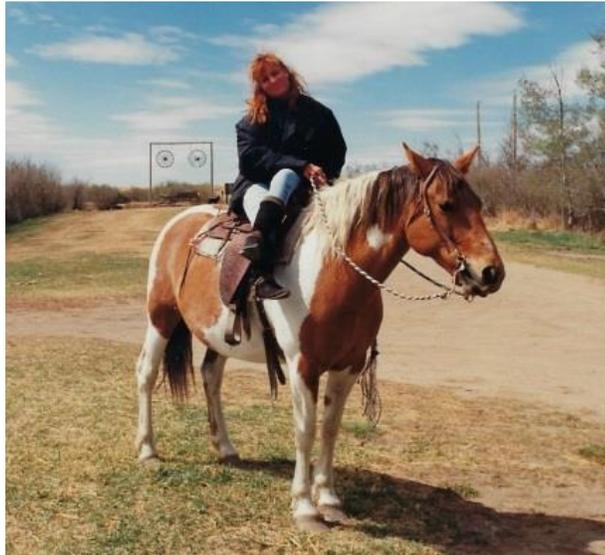
1997: You were 22 years old when you finished your 30-day incarceration and returned to live with your boyfriend Patch. He was a likeable enough young man who had his own struggles but truly seemed to care for you and helped look after you when you were ill. You shared a dark cluster of rooms that rented as an apartment in an otherwise unfinished basement. The house was guarded by a huge Rottweiler.

You completed a High Risk Registry file with a Crossroads outreach worker. This was part of their protocol in connecting with vulnerable people, to assist with identification when bodies were found. I like to believe it was a selfless act on your part although I certainly wish part of the protocol had been to contact families and offer some kind of intervention. I imagine you wished that as well. There were killers loose on Edmonton streets for many years.

I was away on vacation for most of July that year. Before we left, I visited your basement to leave tickets for the upcoming Klondike Days so you would have something to look forward to while we were gone. I was intimidated by the Rottweiler upstairs but you and the dog bonded easily. You simply hugged yourself around him to reassure us both when I dared visit.

2005: A story in the paper would have upset you. Nine wild horses died after they stampeded out of control during a roundup. They drowned after jumping over a bridge wall and

plunging into the river below. You loved all animals and particularly enjoyed the years you spent riding. My heart ached that your life came to such a sad and premature ending, like the wild horses. I miss your innocence and spontaneity, your enthusiasm and simple delights.



July 4: Children at risk

2001: In an incredible tragedy, baby **Hazel Ann Combs**, age 10 weeks, was killed in Edmonton by her 18-year old mother, a young woman with a history of mental illness and addiction who had been in the care of Children's Services since age 11. The mother was later convicted of manslaughter.

2015: A memorial service was held in Edmonton for **Delores Dawn Brower**, mother of one son, who disappeared in 2004 and was found eleven years later. (See May 13.) She was survived by her mother, four step-siblings, and five adoptive siblings.

Dear Cara,

While any child could be at risk for exploitation and abuse, from my experience a number of factors make some more vulnerable than others:

- Predisposition to addictions, whether genetic or by personal characteristics, can lead a young person into a pattern of craving and indulgence.

- Neurological damage or learning difficulties can result in poor planning, chaotic lifestyle, poor impulse control, and impatience with delayed gratification. This includes the range of symptoms associated with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome disorder.
- Poor self-esteem can be related to a range of stressful situations. These include difficulty with school achievement, neglect, conflict at home, and bullying. You were suicidal over a bad haircut and once remarked, “A bad day is when someone calls you a dog and you break a nail.”
- Children who like excitement without a realistic sense of precaution and boundaries are more susceptible to danger.
- Children with dependent personalities may be naïve, lack discernment and try hard for acceptance. We all need a place to belong. Exploiters are known to play on the emotions of young people by making them feel special.
- Defiant children or teens may crave pseudo-independence.
- Homeless teens are particularly vulnerable, as are the mentally ill.

We all want to be financially secure with money to spend. One can imagine how a young person without resources could be seduced by the appeal of seemingly easy money. Economic despair is reflected by the sometimes quoted desperation that “a blow job is better than no job.”

July 5: Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

2003: Five-year-old **Tamra Keepness** disappeared from her family home in Regina.

2017: **Jordin Amber Aksidan**, age 21, was fatally shot in an Edmonton apartment.

2017: Country music star Paul Brandt and former MP Joy Smith joined Calgary police in calling for public help in combatting sexual exploitation.

Dear little Cara,

2004: One year after her disappearance, more than one hundred people marched in honour of *Tamra Keepness* through the downtown Regina neighbourhood where she had lived. Investigators were hoping the anniversary would lead to more tips.

2005: Reflections on children at risk would not be complete without a few words about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. An official Day of Awareness is recognized on September 9th. The effects of alcohol or any drug on an unborn can be wide-ranging and permanent. They affect how victims, learn, work, love, cope, spend money, and adapt in society.

If undiagnosed, children may be labelled lazy, irresponsible, or trouble-makers or their parents blamed for ineffective parenting. Adults with fetal damage often need practical support in dealing with landlords, banks, work sites, bureaucracies, and generally all social institutions. Without adequate assistance, they are vulnerable to criminal charges and/or further victimization.

2014: People gathered again in Regina for the 10th annual Tamra Keepness memorial barbeque. It is devastating when children disappear.

July 6: A Roomful of Missing Women

1988: *Judy Ann Chescue*, age 21, was last seen near her home in Edmonton. She was listed as missing by police three months later in October.

Dear Cara,

2008: A haunting exhibition, containing portraits of fifty women who disappeared from Vancouver's Eastside, was displayed in Edmonton June 20 to July 2 as part of the Works Art and Design Festival. The project, created by Prince George artist Betty Kovacic, also included short pieces of instrumental music written for each portrait and fifty dangling life size blow-up dolls. Each figure was shrouded in black with sashes portraying their lost hopes and dreams to complete to complete the thought, "As a child I dreamed of..."

The exhibition first opened September 27 to November 25, 2007, at the Two Rivers Gallery in Prince George. It was dedicated by the artist to the Missing Women of Downtown Eastside Vancouver and “to all women of all times and all places who have been and will be lost through violence.” Betty began her work in February 2002 after ideas and images began to invade her waking and sleeping hours. Betty states in her description of the project:

“I felt it was important to portray each woman in a style and technique that expressed individuality. I explored any creative idea or process that I thought would achieve this goal. Each work was created with respect and grief for the loss of life that it represents...

It is my wish that this exhibition will accomplish, in part, what the missing women could not achieve in life. I trust that the viewers will look into the face of each woman long enough to really ‘see’ her, acknowledge her individual significance and embrace our common humanity. Only as a society that honours everyone’s intrinsic human value can we provide safety for all and try to prevent something like this from ever occurring again.”

Betty Kovacic in *A Roomful of Missing Women* (2007, p.1)



(Photo by Ken Turner for Two Rivers Gallery, Prince George)

The fifty women honoured, listed from the date they were last seen, are as follows:

Sherry Lynn Rail (Nov 1983)	Laura Mah (Aug 1985)
Elaine Allenbach (March 1988)	Taressa Ann Williams (July 1988)
Ingrid Soet (Aug 1989)	Kathleen Dale Wattley (June 1992)
Elsie Sebastian (June 1992)	Leigh Miner (Dec 1993)
Angela Arseneault (Aug 1994)	Catherine Louise Gonzalez (March 1995)
Catherine Maureen Knight (April 1995)	Dorothy Ann Spence (Aug 1995)
Diana Melnick (Aug 1995)	Frances Ann Young (April 1996)
Tanya Marlo Holyk (Oct 1996)	Olivia Gale William (Dec 1996)
Sherry Irving (April 1997)	Helen Mae Hallmark (Oct 1997)
Janet Gail Henry (June 1997)	Jacqueline Maria Murdock (Jan 1997)
Marnie Lee Frey (Sept 1997)	Cindy Louise Beck (Sept 1997)
Cynthia Feliks (Dec 1997)	Stephanie Marie Lane (Jan 1997)
Andrea Fay Borhaven (March 1997)	Kerry Lynn Koski (Jan 1998)
Inga Monique Hall (Feb 1998)	Sarah Jean de Vries (April 1998)
Sheila Catherine Egan (July 1998)	Julie Louise Young (Oct 1998)
Angela Rebecca Jardine (Nov 1998)	Michelle Gurney (Dec 1998)
Marcella Helen Creison (Dec 1998)	Ruby Anne Hardy (1998)
Jacqueline Michelle McDonell (Jan 1999)	Brenda Ann Wolfe (Feb 1999)
Georgina Faith Papin (March 1999)	Wendy Crawford (Dec 1999)
Jennifer Lynn Furminger (Dec 1999)	Tiffany Louise Drew (March 2000)
Dawn Crey (Nov 2000)	Debra Lynne Jones (Dec 2000)
Patricia Rose Johnson (March 2001)	Heather Gabrielle Chinnock (April 2001)
Heather Kathleen Bottomley (April 2001)	Andrea Joesbury (June 2001)
Sereena Abotsway (Aug 2001)	Dianne Rock (Oct 2001)
Mona Lee Wilson (Nov 2001)	Danielle Larue (Dec 2002)



July 7: Drug use health issue or crime?

2003: A decomposing body was found by a farmer swathing his field near Leduc south of Edmonton. She was later identified as **Katie Sylvia Ballentyne**, age 40, mother of four children aged eight to 14. Sylvia was born in The Pas, Manitoba, spent time in Saskatoon, and lived in Edmonton for two years where friends last saw her April 27. The eldest of eight children, she was fluent in Cree and French as well as English. The location east of Leduc was near where the burned remains of **Edna Bernard**, age 28, were found in October of 2002. The media raised the question of a serial killer after the third body was found in a field later that year.

My dear Cara,

1992: In one of our more normal days, we had fun playing Monopoly all evening. The irony of our roommate cleaning up with hotels on cheap properties remained with me.

1993: After your girlfriend Audacious made a mess trying to cook scrambled eggs in the middle of the night, I informed you that inebriated friends were not allowed in the apartment. There was a downtown shelter where the publicly intoxicated could sleep so I had a referral option in case it happened again and was determined to dispatch any offender to that address.

2017: It seems clear in many ways that drug use could be better managed by treating it as a health issue. Programs could address personal and family problems that trigger use and provide supportive housing for those trapped in addiction. It is reasonable that families have the option of drug-free homes and not have to deal with users, just as they are not expected to care for seriously ill family members without medical support. We do not push people to the fringes of society as punishment for physical illness. Why do we allow it for the “difficult to manage” mentally ill or those crippled by addiction?

“Safe” injection sites are often quoted as an example of “harm reduction” for those actively using. It seems we also need “safe sleep” sites for those who make a habit of harassing friends and relatives.

July 8: Finally a refreshing perspective

2014: On this day in Ottawa, then Justice Minister Peter MacKay opened a week of hearings by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. **Bill C-36, the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act**, proposed to criminalize the purchase of sexual services.

Minister MacKay's opening remarks included:

"The government does not accept that prostitution is inevitable... On the contrary, the government maintains that prostitution's inherent harms and dangers would only grow and be exacerbated in a regime that perpetrates and condones the exploitation of vulnerable individuals through legalized prostitution.

"Accordingly, **Bill C-36's goal is... to reduce the demand for prostitution with a view to discouraging entry into it, deterring participation in it, and ultimately abolishing it to the extent possible.**" (Emphasis added.)

Dear Cara,

1994: "Our women are in danger" read the *Edmonton Journal* headline. The Native Women's Association of Canada called upon the federal government and police to take violence against women more seriously, pointing to the many unsolved murders in the Edmonton area. It was estimated at the time that hundreds of Aboriginal women had been murdered or gone missing in the previous 20 years. The Association started the "Sisters in Spirit" campaign, asking for permanent regional offices, research, and a national registry and hotline.

2005: Media announced that a missing pin, costing less than one dollar, caused the massive Queen of Oak Bay ferry to lose power and run aground last week. The lack of that one pin allowed a nut to drop off a speed governor and disconnect from the engines. How symbolic that we could never underestimate the value of each contribution, no matter how small.

Our country is haunted by hundreds, if not thousands, of mostly Aboriginal women who disappeared without documentation or follow-up. Counts vary with different reports and there are frequent calls for a public national inquiry.

July 9: Working in a vacuum?

“We are not simply to bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of Injustice; we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1908 – 1945)

Dear little Cara,

1997: It was heart wrenching to plan a vacation without you. As illustrated in my letter on this date, I was not sure who would be looking out for you while I was gone:

To Forensic Assessment and Community Services,

“Please be advised that Cara received her Depo-Provera [birth control] injection on June 2 and her long overdue Fluanxol [anti-psychotic] the evening of July 7.

I became concerned about Cara’s mental health two weeks ago when she told me she was praying I would not be overcome by evil. My concern increased this week as she began to rant and rave about people hiding and stealing her clothes, people eating in front of her... and seeing pubic hairs on the floor. With these thought disturbances, she also becomes more irritable and unpleasant...

I am also annoyed that Cara’s stock of medication has apparently been misplaced. I know it exists because I personally waited at [the Pharmacy] one afternoon to have it filled, endured a lengthy phone interrogation from an authorizing nurse, and then personally delivered it to your office...

I remain concerned about the long term care of my daughter. I know quite well from my own experience how difficult it is to try to care for someone who seems unable or unwilling to care for themselves... It seems far more humane and economical to keep her controlled so she is spared incarceration and/or hospital cycles. It’s not as if these interventions have made a difference in the past...”

I never did receive a response.

July 10: “Has Anyone Seen my Heart?”

2017: The bodies of **Glynnis Emmaleen Fox**, age 36, mother of seven, and her sister, **Tiffany Jonie Agnes Ear**, age 39, mother of nine, were found dead in a burning car as part of a quadruple murder. The ladies were from Stoney Nakoda Nation near Calgary.

Dear little Cara,

2003: This above title was given to a book of poetry and art assembled as a fund-raiser for CEASE: Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation. The words were from a poem written by Monica Yellowknee, circa 1999:

Can you see me?

I walk the streets from morning till night.

I sit all over but no one notices me.

I live and breathe and need love just like you.

I'm also lonely but no one cares.

The whole world keeps on rushing by.

It seems mostly by me.

I can't remember when anyone talked to me.

Except to tell me to move on.

What do they mean move on?

I have no place to go.

Besides can't I stand or sit in this public place?

I don't remember anyone ever looking into my eyes.

If they did they would see that I have hopes and

Dreams inside just like them.

I guess no one cares,

I'm getting used to that,

But sometimes I ache so bad.

Most days I'm a little hungry and somewhat dirty.

I wonder does God care?

Does God really come into people's lives?

If so how come they don't see me?

Because I think if God were walking alone and saw

Me

He would stop and look into my eyes.

Yes, He would, and then my hopes and dreams would come true.

I'd be loved.

But that's not my life.

People are afraid of me.

Don't be, I won't rob, beat, or kill you if you just

Stop.

Yes, stop, and look into my eyes.

Has anyone seen my heart?

July 11: Leaps of faith

2016: **Sara Catherine Baillie**, age 34, was found murdered in her Calgary home with her daughter, **Taliyah Leigh Marsman**, age 5, missing. A man with an extensive criminal history was charged with two counts of first-degree murder.

Dear Cara,

1997 was my last contact with a nurse at the Women's Emergency shelter before leaving on vacation. It felt as if I was abandoning you as I did not trust Patch or the precarious support in place to provide adequate protection while I was gone.

2005: Eight years later I was still triggered by apparent proximity to death. While returning to Edmonton from a wedding in British Columbia, instead of marvelling at the magnificent highways and the reliability of thousands of vehicles on the road, I was acutely aware that one slight wrong move could send us smashing into the rocky cliff of a mountain or catapulting down the other side into a deep crevasse.

Fortunately, as a passenger, I was able to distract myself with reading. Queen Noor's wonderful book, *Leap of Faith: Memoirs of an Unexpected Life* (2003), told of her marriage to King Hussein in 1978 and her chosen country of Jordan. We both led unexpected lives. She was younger than me by a few years and able to conduct herself graciously on the world stage while I often felt banished to the shadows. What a difference the opportunity of circumstance and birth can make.

2015: In Edmonton a group of people gathered on July 5 to write the names of murdered Canadian women on the steps of City Hall. The event "Chalk4Change" was organized by a woman who found it troubling that there was little concern expressed regarding the recent murder of Andrea Berg, a family friend found stuffed in a shopping cart. (See June 16.)

July 12: Falling through the cracks

2005: **Liana White**, age 29, was reported missing in Edmonton. Her disappearance appeared to be taken very seriously in comparison to many Aboriginal women.

2015: **Katie (Kathleen) Emma Morton**, age 27, was found shot to death in a south Edmonton basement suite. The killing was believed to be gang-related.

Her obituary stated: "Our family is heartbroken to announce the sudden and violent passing of our precious daughter... While Katie struggled with addiction, and life's choices, we loved her still. She had a tender, vulnerable and empathetic heart."

Dear Cara,

1996: One day after getting you settled in interim accommodation and obtaining token financial assistance, I called back to Alberta Hospital about forms I thought had been promised. Oh no, I was told, they were committed to do forms only when you were ready, not me. In spite of documented borderline intelligence, they felt your chief problem was addiction because your psychosis had been "drug induced." The power of the two I.Q. points separating you from dependent adult status made you responsible for many life decisions.

The social worker even suggested you would be safe staying at the women's emergency shelter. Although I do not like to criticize my own profession, this woman had obviously never been to the shelter after dark when desperate ladies lined the alley across the street offering themselves to men cruising by. It's hard to imagine strong-minded women, much less the poor and homeless, having to pass that gauntlet of desperate buyers and sellers on their way "home" every evening.

July 13: Diminished dreams

2004: The woman found June 21 in a wooded area near Wetaskawin was identified as **Lynn Minia Jackson**, age 34, mother of four. She was originally from Saddle Lake.

Hi Sweetie,

1997: As per the compromise suggested by hospital staff, you and I visited a lawyer that summer. You agreed to sign documents giving me “enduring” power of attorney so I could act on your behalf with respect to financial affairs. The “enduring” part meant I could continue to do so if you became incapable of managing your own affairs.

Not surprisingly, you passed the statutory requirements of understanding the nature and effect of the documents you signed. You could be sweet and pleasant when your psychosis was controlled. You also signed a Health Care Directive allowing me to make health care decisions on your behalf if you were incapacitated. Both documents gave me legal rights to advocate on your behalf if your capacity was challenged, as often happened.

Meanwhile on summer vacation, Will and I left our rental car in Ottawa and flew to Halifax. From there we travelled to Prince Edward Island across the new Confederation Bridge, the longest continuous marine span bridge in the world. A few days later we crossed to Cape Breton by ferry and drove along the incredibly picturesque Cabot Trail. I worried continually about how you were managing back in Alberta.

July 14: A glimpse of narcissism

2014: Breaking News: Murder Charges in Calgary. Even though their bodies were not yet found, murder charges were laid re the little boy **Nathan O'Brien** (age 5) and his grandparents **Kathryn and Alvin Liknes** (ages 53 and 66) who were missing two weeks since June 30.

2016: The body of **Taliyah Leigh Marsman**, age 5, was found on a rural property near Calgary. She was missing from her mother's home since July 11.

Dear Cara,

1997: You often claimed your anger came from the frustration of living with Block, even after we'd been free of him for years. Regrettably, Block, who played the role of step-father for

ten years, seemed to become more controlling and rigid as you children entered adolescence. He reacted defensively as his sons and you developed more independent thinking and dared to question his expectations.

The traits of narcissism I did not recognize, or even know, at the time are important enough that I will repeat them. The line that caught my attention years later was: “narcissists will do *anything*, including brutalizing their own family, to maintain their own feeling that others see them as without any flaws” (tearsandhealing.com/narcissistic-personality-disorder.) The website further explains, “Narcissists will strain every muscle to meet their own ‘flawless’ image, and demean or destroy anyone or anything who cast any doubt on this image.” That was Block in a nutshell. I can’t imagine why I thought he might feel differently about us after hearing tales of how he’d been wronged by his ex-wife and select colleagues.

It is important for children to experience unconditional love, support, guidance, security, and healthy role models. I thought being an independent, self-supporting, and nurturing single mom would be enough, but who was I kidding? I sacrificed my independence for the greater security of a two-income family and compromised my personality at home to pacify Block’s contemptuous temperament.

You inherited the unreliable nature of the biological father you barely knew, no doubt questioned his absence, and rebelled against the critical rejection of acting step-father Block. While you and I had our disagreements, we always knew there was an irrevocable bond of attachment beneath any temporary alienation.

2014: The *Edmonton Sun* ran a sobering story about 122 surviving “comfort women” suing the South Korean government in an attempt to regain their human dignity and receive compensation. The women claimed to have been recruited in the 1960s and 1970s to work in

brothels serving U.S troops. After the degrading indignities they endured as so-called “patriots” and “civilian diplomats,” they were neglected, stigmatized, and left to live in poverty. The lawsuit, it was reported, came at an embarrassing time for South Korea, which was also pushing Japan to atone for atrocities during the Second World War such as forcing Korean women to serve as sex slaves for their soldiers.

How sad that women are used as the pawns and bounty of war. Evidence shows, not surprisingly, that sexual exploitation is more rampant in countries where it is tolerated. This indicates that socialization and education can play a role in shaping the behaviour of consumers. Personal conscience is not enough to protect human rights when violations are “allowed” or even culturally sanctioned. We can do better as a society.

July 15: Housing First

2005: **Amber Tara Lynn Redman - Red Star Woman**, age 19, disappeared from outside a Fort Qu'Appelle bar in southern Saskatchewan. Three years later a man was charged with murder and eventually pled guilty. Her remains were found May 5, 2008, in a dusty ditch on a remote gravel road on the Little Black Bear reserve northeast of Regina. Amber was from Standing Buffalo First Nation.

Her obituary stated: “**Red Star Woman** inspired a positive difference to those around her. Her heart roused sensitivity for victims of violence throughout the country. Since she first disappeared three years ago, her spirit was kept alive. Though, now we know her spirit is surrounded by relatives in the Spirit World, her love, her beauty, and her laughter will always be remembered in our hearts. She will be dearly missed and the beauty of her Spirit will shine forever.”

Dear Cara,

2016: Many articles are written about lack of care for the mentally ill, stigmatization, and inadequate supports. Those issues are more complex when addictions are added. My greatest sadness, and I'm sure yours too, is that you lacked a stable home for much of your last few years.

“Housing First” is a philosophy based on the principle that everyone has the right to a safe and secure home. That seems so basic and yet it’s surprising how many residences create obstacles, for example, you are not allowed to use drugs or be under the influence, you must be in by a certain time, you are not allowed to have overnight company of the opposite sex, etc. Many vulnerable chose homelessness to preserve what they perceive as basic rights. Even more incomprehensible is the sub-species of predators in society who exploit and destroy those who have already lost so much.

July 16: The Ascending

“Dissociation is adaptive: it allows relatively normal functioning for the duration of the traumatic event and leaves a large part of the personality unaffected by the trauma.”

Bessel Van der Kolk

2016: **Allanah Jamima Cardinal**, age 20, mother of one daughter, went missing in the Goodfish Lake area northeast of Edmonton. Her remains were found nine days later. Her family did not accept the police finding of suicide.

Dear Cara,

2005: Driving through the river valley past Telus Tower reminded me of the time you phoned from the top floor to share your excitement about the view. That would have been a grade six field trip for you, the year I was studying. Otherwise, I would not have been home to answer the phone. Your infectious enthusiasm and unbridled delight in new experiences were some of your enduring qualities.

2008: Wayne Ashley, a Cree artist from Alexander First Nation, then age 41, created a three-metre tall porcelain mosaic to honour unnamed dead in Holy Cross cemetery in Edmonton. The idea for such a memorial came to him at his grandfather’s funeral when he noticed many unmarked graves and thought of many others across the country. The monument, named The

Ascending, mixes Aboriginal symbols of life and death and depicts the journey from this life to the afterlife. Symbols include the tree of life, teepee, powerful bear, protective eagle, wise turtle, and bear claw for healing. The Ascending is dedicated to all who lie in unmarked places.

2014: Last night I had the nicest dream. You were a young teen, we had gone through some difficult times but I promised to make it better and we were at peace together. The setting was my grandparents' farm where I roamed as a child. Suddenly two cars full of family and friends arrived to spend the day. Block appeared and reproached me for having orchestrated support. "No," I protested in delight, "everyone arrived spontaneously just to be with us!"

July17: Good news stories

2005: The body of **Liana White**, age 29, mother of one, was found in Edmonton five days after she allegedly disappeared on her way to work. (See July 18.)

Dear Cara,

2005: The second of a two-part story in the Sunday Reader of the *Edmonton Journal*, "Putting away Punky's killer: Law and Order," described the prosecution team's success in obtaining a first-degree murder conviction for the rape and murder of little 6-year-old Punky Gustavson in 1992.

It is a rather sad commentary on our justice system that DNA evidence (obtained only in March 2001 with advanced techniques and matched in January 2003) and a signed confession (obtained March 2003) were not enough to ensure conviction. Two years of intense legal preparation by six members of the Crown office were also required while the accused had the benefit, probably at public expense, of a renowned defence lawyer.

A preliminary hearing was held in July 2004 plus a further hearing in March 2005 to determine that the accused could be tried by a jury. The trial began May 2005 with years of

investigation compressed into eight days of testimony. Clifford Sleigh was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to life imprisonment with no parole for 25 years.

Heroes of the story included the two detectives who dedicated 11 years to investigation, two interrogators who spent six weeks preparing for their interview, the three Crown prosecutors and journalist David Staples. There are no words to describe those who provided false alibi to allow Sleigh to escape justice for so many years. One can only hope they too will be held accountable someday. (“Homicide of Punky: Part 1” ran on July 12, 2005.)

July 18: “Domestic” violence - Who is responsible?

Violence is one response to unbearable stress; others are physical illness, mental illness, and suicide.

1998: **Marilyn Weibe**, age 37, was beaten to death outside an inner city bar. A man was later charged with second-degree murder.

2014: The body of **Jessica Wyoma Lynn Boysis**, age 20, was found in a treed area in Wetaskawin. Jessica, from Maskwacis, was last seen three days earlier. Two years later, in October 2016, a man was charged with second-degree murder.

My darling Cara,

2005: In late breaking news yesterday, the body of Liana White was found in north Edmonton by a search team organized by her husband Michael. She had reportedly vanished on her way to work five days earlier. The afternoon was overcast and spooky with darkened skies.

What impressed me was that police and media seemed to take Liana’s disappearance very seriously and give it deserved attention. Was it because she was a nice Caucasian lady with a predictable lifestyle, or perhaps her husband was identified a suspicious “person of interest” from the beginning? Michael White was later charged with second-degree murder and indignity to a human body.

Michael was found guilty a year and half later on December 7, 2006. Liana was four months pregnant with their second child when she died.

An earlier article (*Edmonton Journal*, July 2) reported 84 gang-related homicides in Canada in 2003, compared to 89 homicides of spouses or intimate partners. With the latter, 85% of the victims were women. Being in a relationship, it seemed, was more dangerous for women than being in a gang. While we know that not all men are violent or abusive, most women can report having been intimidated or sexually assaulted by a man as part of their life experience.

Domestic violence, like exploitation, is a lingering social problem across all cultures and socio-economic groups. As well as legal sanctions, we need to nurture equality, respect, and dignity so that people cease to dominate or commodify others.

July 19: Modelling camp

“As a single footstep will not make a path on the earth, so a single thought will not make a pathway in the mind. To make a deep physical path, we walk again and again. To make a deep mental path, we must think over and over the kind of the thoughts we wish to dominate our lives.”

Henry David Thoreau @ Hippie Peace Freaks

Dear little Cara,

2005: While reading campus humour in the *Reader's Digest*, I experienced a “grief burst.” This expression is often quoted in grief literature (original source unknown) to explain a sudden and unexpected burst of sadness triggered by a random memory.

Something reminded me of your student residence in Halifax, the accommodation provided for your week-long modelling camp. The first year, after grade eight, you attended with your friend Paula, the second year by yourself. The second time you had been admitted to an adolescent psychiatric ward a month earlier. The hospital allowed you a pass to go to camp as it had been prearranged. You said you didn't tell the other girls about being in hospital and I

replied that was okay, they didn't need to know. I felt such a wave of sadness remembering the poignancy of your statement. Of course, we all want to be seen as normal.

Oh my sweetie, how difficult that must have been for you. Your admission to hospital seemed the only solution that spring after we finally moved out of the house we shared with Block. I somehow thought after all your conflict with him, you would settle down once we had our own place. We had a few good days but your behaviour was still unpredictable. I remember you screaming for hours one night for reasons I didn't even understand and knew that something more needed to change. What a bizarre ending to a bizarre three years.

July 20: Moon landing

2006: **Nadine Robinson-Creary**, age 35, was found dead in her home. The cause of her death was not released.

2013: **Bella Nancy Marie Laboucan-McLean**, age 25, from Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation near Peace River in northern Alberta, fell 31 storeys from a condo balcony in downtown Toronto. Police deemed her death "suspicious" as the five other people at the party apparently failed to realize she was missing.

Bella attended high school, Concordia College, and University of Alberta in Edmonton and had recently graduated from Toronto Humber College fashion arts program. She was remembered as beautiful, loving, caring, kind, strong-willed, strong-hearted, and proud of her Indigenous culture. Her parents were both teachers.

Dear Cara,

1969 was the first time men landed on the moon after three days of travel from Earth. Twenty years old at the time, I was totally awed, gazing at the moon and imagining them there. At the same time, I reflected on the spiritual dimension of humanity and remember wondering about the journey to the Creator that we are all called to experience.

2005: Sorting wedding photos was an interesting trip down memory lane because you were in so many. You would have liked the pictures of you and Patch together.

The problem was you were always on the move and losing your belongings. The police still have a suitcase they recovered from Patch's basement that has never been returned. I have a few of your outfits hanging in the spare closet and a blouse that carries your fragrance. Your friend Carma told me about scents as I sorted your clothes. I checked and sure enough, one blouse had a hint of foundation that reminded me of you. You really liked your make-up.

July 21: Multiple challenges and multiple griefs

"Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding a deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only love can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." Martin Luther King

Dear Cara,

2005: As I reflect on our time together, there are many levels of loss. First I had to accept your limited academic abilities. You attended regular classes through elementary and junior high so grade ten was the first time you had to make serious career choices. Your beauty culture program seemed an appropriate alternative.

Experimentation with drugs and alcohol is not unusual for some teens. Neither substance was allowed in our apartment and, as per a *Toughlove* (1985) tip, I simply asked that you and your friends not show up drunk or stoned. That meant you did not come home some weekends. Any alcohol found in the apartment was promptly left outside as a bonus for local bottle pickers.

Your psychotic episodes left me overwhelmed and bewildered as I did not realize at the time that mental illness could be related to drug use. Nor did I anticipate so many barriers in obtaining treatment. Your downward spirals were confusing and difficult to manage, even more frustrating when professionals held you responsible as your deterioration was "drug-induced."

Through it all I began to learn, albeit slowly, to cope with the sad realities of addiction, mental illness, and sexual exploitation. They were hard lessons. Precious and unique human beings have the right to be loved and respected and to receive resources to help them live.

July 22: Children doubly impacted

“Just let go. Let go of how you thought your life should be, and embrace the life that is trying to work its way into your consciousness.” Caroline Myss @ Spiritual Unite

2000: Buddy and Belle were married in a very private ceremony to avoid dueling parents who did not want to see each other. Will and I attended their celebration a few weeks later when all the exes met in Texas.

Dear Cara,

2005: News the last few days was all about the murder of Liana White, a sobering reminder that domestic violence can be fatal. The Whites seemed to be a typical middle class family; they lived in a nice neighborhood; she had a good job where she was well liked and respected. The flaws in the picture were also reported. He faced previous charges in the military; there were debt problems, a new mortgage, etc. What is most sad is the little 3-year-old girl who lost both parents in such a tragic way.

Ripe Berries Moon, in Medicine Wheel tradition, teaches people to work from their heart center, face fears, demonstrate affection, and develop leadership abilities with courage.

July 23: Ripe Berries Moon

2016: **Cory Grey**, age 19, and her boyfriend **Dylan Laboucan**, age 17, disappeared from their Whitefish River First Nation home. Both were accepted to attend Northern Lakes College in Slave Lake that fall. They were later found shot in the High Prairie area. Another teen from the community was charged with two counts of second-degree murder, pled guilty, and was sentenced to life in prison.

Dear Cara,

1997: Before Will and I visited Nova Scotia, part of me had no desire to ever return. Although I desperately needed a break, there were too many haunting memories from when you lived there. I worried the whole time we were gone from Edmonton.

I have no desire to go back, past the schools you attended, the fields where you used to ride, the homes of your friends, Arby's where you liked to eat, the Exhibition grounds where you competed with your horse, the house we shared with Block, the apartment where we stayed before moving back to Alberta, the malls where you used to shop, the "club" where teen parties were held, the office of the counsellor we saw together where I first learned about your heart shrinking, the hospital where I used to work, and even the office of the dentist where, much to my amazement, you chose to have work done holding crystals. No, no desire to return.

I remember yelling at a woman in a Halifax shopping center to stop berating her young daughter. She came running after me, screaming that it was her daughter and she would treat her how she wanted. I kept walking, resisting my impulse to say that if it were anyone else's daughter, I would call the police. Tension was high but I didn't want a scene to delay my departure. It was a relief to finally clear Nova Scotia air space on our return to Alberta.

July 24: To live without regret

2001: The beaten body of **Annette Marie Janvier**, age 36, mother of two from Fort McMurray, was found inside a shed in a field on the western outskirts of Edmonton. A man described as a long-time acquaintance was charged with second-degree murder.

My dear little child,

2005: I remember reading (source unknown) how our hearts can literally almost stop beating in periods of emotional trauma such as intense shock, grief, and anger. "Broken heart

syndrome” is associated with a massive adrenaline rush that can cause severe but reversible dysfunction of the heart muscle, mimicking a heart attack.

My heart aches at times wishing I had been a better parent, wondering how, when, or what I could have done differently. I remember speaking with a man in hospital whose wife was dying. “I wish I’d loved her better,” he said, then added wistfully, “I’m not sure how... but I’m sure I could have.” What a beautiful gift to live with no regret. That is my new goal. If we live each day as if it were our last, would we be satisfied?

A story in *Chicken Soup for the Volunteer’s Soul* (2002, p.209-213) spoke to my heart. It’s called “Forgive Me, Davey” and tells of a retired physician who became a local legend for his volunteer energy in supporting the community.

When asked about his inspiration, he told of driving by an accident scene 17 years earlier and choosing not to stop. He found out later his only son had been injured and died. The doctor was told by a police detective, “...there was nothing anyone could have done.” Of course, the doctor lived forever with the question of whether he might have made a difference, and regret that he missed the opportunity to at least say goodbye to his son. It is to his credit he was able to channel his grief into positive action.

The lesson I take from this story is to not miss an opportunity to do good, to go the extra mile, to extend a helping hand, or to offer a word of support. I frequently stumble, often become impatient, and sometimes strive to protect the quiet of my retirement after years of service. The key is always to find the right balance. While we have the right to be nurtured and refreshed, we also have an obligation to share our blessings with those less fortunate.

July 25: Search for meaning

2005: A young man, **Darcey Wade Klassen**, age 25, was discovered in a rural area south of Lloydminster, not far from where Grandma grew up. Three men were charged with first-degree murder; a fourth with forcible confinement, and RCMP were searching for a fifth suspect. Darcey was struggling with crack cocaine addiction. His mother wished his death would be a wake-up call for other teens thinking of experimenting with drugs. "I hope in some way, for some of the kids that knew him, this helps them walk away from the drugs. I'd like to think God took him for a reason," she said.

2012: **Alexandra Noble**, age 25, mother of a young son, was strangled in a west-end Edmonton apartment. Her ex-boyfriend was charged with second-degree murder.

2016: Remains identified as **Alannah Jamima Cardinal**, age 20, were found. Alannah was last seen July 16 at Goodfish Lake northeast of Edmonton. The family did not accept that she committed suicide as police suggested.

Dear Cara,

1999: The province of British Columbia announced a \$100,000 reward to help solve the disappearance of 31 women from Vancouver's downtown east side, 22 within the previous four years. This was unprecedented at the time as there had been "no evidence of foul play" in that no bodies had been found. *America's Most Wanted* TV show, with host John Walsh, was in Vancouver at the time filming an episode about the missing women.

John Walsh is a living example of how a terrible tragedy can be turned into positive energy. He was a successful businessman in the United States when his six-year-old son Adam was abducted from a shopping center in 1981. Adam's head was found two weeks later.

Following the crime, the Walsh family became strong advocates for increased awareness of missing children and legislative changes. *America's Most Wanted* was launched in 1988 and contributed to the capture of many fugitives. I am grateful John Walsh was able to play a role in helping the missing and murdered women of Canada.

July 26: Diminished returns

2001: *Cindy Lee Paulson*, age 32, was stabbed to death during a party at a north-end Edmonton apartment. A 19-year-old woman was charged, pled guilty to second-degree murder, and received a six year sentence.

Dear Cara,

2004: In reviewing old papers written pre-parenting, I recognized my spirit as idealistic, exploring philosophical rather than emotional concepts. We can only build on what we have become.

One of my studies, dredged from university archives, was about social work planning and administration. What struck me was the concept of diminished returns:

“The cost of social services is born by each citizen who ascribes to the government the responsibility for caring for the handicapped, the mentally ill, the aged, the unemployed, the delinquent, or those unable to cope adequately with life in society. However, social services must operate within the budget margin assigned by the funding bodies who decide when enough resources have allocated for the relative benefits received.

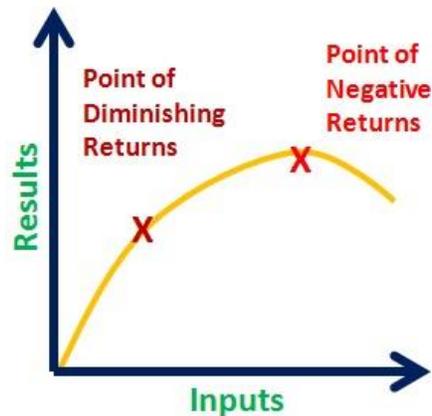
Most social services are subject to what economists call ‘diminished returns.’ This means, as more and more crime is controlled, what remains becomes more and more difficult to control.

Similarly, as more and more handicapped become trained in employable skills or placed in foster homes, those remaining require more resources in terms of staff time and energy. As more and more unemployed or delinquents are retrained or rehabilitated, those remaining will be more difficult to reach, and so on.

This becomes a crucial dilemma in the planning of social services. Because services are most often designed for the potentially successful, clients with higher possibilities of success may often get more and better treatment.

The service agency, with a limited amount of resources, is caught between justifying public expense by showing ‘results’ and the moral question of providing quality care to those more in need but less able to respond. There is added conflict when the needs of the client, the demands of the bureaucracy, and the public definition of the problem are discrepant.”

That was an apt preview of the challenges I would face with your seemingly out-of-control life. Agencies who tried to help experienced diminished returns, as I did with parenting. Many questions remain.



July 27: Heart connections

1992: The badly decomposed body of **Cassandra Irene Francis**, age 21, mother of a young son, was found in a ravine in south-west Edmonton by children looking for bottles. She was last seen in Calgary the week before. Police reported they were not sure if she died at the scene or if her body was dumped. However she arrived, it is unlikely she walked almost 10 miles (16 kilometers) from downtown to rest in Mill Creek ravine. And yet there seemed to be little further investigation.

Dear Cara,

1992: I knew Cassandra Francis as “Sandy” when she was a little girl. Her mother was your father’s sister so Sandy would have been your cousin. You never did meet each other although you looked alike when you were younger. You found pictures of little Sandy with her parents in my photo album and asked, “Who are those strangers talking me for a walk?”

Sandy, married with a little boy, was last seen in Calgary on July 18. Later I dropped off a card at the police station to be forwarded to her mother. She eventually called back, said she was living in Vancouver and looking after three little girls. We didn’t maintain contact.

I remember saving the news clippings about Sandy, then later discarding them as if they were a bad omen. That part of my life was long over and I did not want to jinx the future. You were 17 that summer, not interested in news, and I did not explain the connection to you.

2014: My lingering concern is that a genetic generational curse followed you. After your death, the RCMP located your biological father Chaos in order to recreate your DNA. We spoke briefly on the phone and he said he thought you'd be safe with me. I thought so as well.

Sandy seldom appears on the lists of mysterious and unsolved deaths. Investigators at the time were apparently satisfied that she somehow walked miles out of town in a strange city and threw herself in a creek to die.

July 28: Avoiding grief

2015: The remains of **Corrie Renee Ottenbriet** were found on a rural property east of Leduc. She was 27 when she disappeared eleven years earlier.

Dearest Cara,

2014: Sometimes a surprise comes when we most need it. That was the case with a poem received from a friend – and I realized guilt was just another way of avoiding grief:

“When Tomorrow Starts Without Me” by David Romano

When tomorrow starts without me and I'm not here to see...
If the sun should rise and find your eyes filled with tears for me,

I wish so much you wouldn't cry the way you did today...
While thinking of the many things we didn't get to say.

I know how much you loved me, as much as I love you...
And each time you think of me, I know you'll miss me too. ...

So when tomorrow starts without me, don't think we're far apart...
For every time you think of me, I'm right here in your heart.

July 29: Premonition of tragedy

1999: Two Canadian girls, **Chanal Roberts**, age 18, and **Amanda Hodges**, age 17, friends from Toronto, were brutally murdered in Detroit. They were shot in the head, wrapped in sheets and electrical wire, and dumped in an alley. It was not reported how they were lured to Detroit's escort "business" or why they were suddenly deemed a liability except they were supposedly heading home for a festival. Perhaps the message (to others) was "Don't even think of escape." The three accused killers were once bodyguards for the escort agency.

Dear Cara,

1997: This morning, as Will and I left Halifax to return to Edmonton, I was an emotional wreck until we were safely out of Nova Scotia air space. I worried about you the whole three weeks we were away and was anxious to see you again.

It was strange visiting Nova Scotia without you but there was no way you could have come. Will and I didn't even tell you we were going. We visited many tourist sites such as Peggy's Cove, Lunenburg, Blue Rocks, and Mahone Bay and even the "Big Ex" where you participated with your horse in better days. We stayed with our former neighbors and slept in your friend Paula's old room. Your picture was still on her wall.

It was eerie looking up the hill at where you and I used to live. I looked down that hill many times when you and Paula were friends. It was special to know you were still remembered there where you spent many happy days.

July 30: Life disrupted

2011: An awareness walk, hosted by the Stolen Sister's Awareness organization, was held in Edmonton for **Amber Alyssa Tuccaro**. The 20-year-old from Mikisew Cree First Nation, who travelled from Fort McMurray with her 14-month-old son and a female friend, was staying at a Nisku hotel when she caught a ride to Edmonton on August 18, 2010. Amber's remains were found over a year later. (See September 1.)

Dear Cara,

1997: I was home from vacation and restless to see you in my few free days before returning to work. My worry turned to frustration as those days passed with no call and I was unable to track you down.

Do you remember the first time Grandma and Grandpa visited Nova Scotia? That was in 1988. It was exciting for them to go on a trip together and very special for us to have them with us. We drove to Prince Edward Island, stayed with a cousin in Charlottetown, and watched the classic *Anne of Green Gables* play. Grandpa was fascinated by the red soil and even brought home a little jarful. Their second visit in 1990 was a disaster because I had already rented our apartment, you were in the hospital, and Block was insistent about not wanting you at the house even to visit your grandparents. Juggling places and people put extra stress on everyone.

July 31: Remembering Black Friday

1997: **Carol Meredith**, age 29, was abducted and murdered by her estranged husband. Her body was found a week later. He was found guilty of first-degree murder the following year.

2010: **Angel Bird**, age 22, recently engaged from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, was stabbed in Edmonton by her fiancé's sister, age 19, after an argument.

2017: **Joelle Cardinal**, age 21, mother of two girls, was stabbed to death on Bigstone Cree Nation in northern Alberta. Her ex-boyfriend, father of the girls, was charged with second-degree murder.

Dear Cara,

1987: What is the greatest loss? July 31 was Friday when Edmonton was struck by a tornado. As terror ripped across the city and wiped out a trailer park, Block and I were caught in tumult of our own making. It was the day we vacated our little house in anticipation of moving

to Nova Scotia. Block consistently refused to help sort or give away belongings and demeaned me for not believing everything would fit in the covered truck he purchased. About noon, he sheepishly admitted the truck was full – and we had two rooms left to pack.

It was a nightmare which, to this day, chills me with the absurdity of turmoil and annoys me when people refuse to plan. The good news was that we found lots of support. A friend came with a flat-bed truck to help clear the house and haul away unintended donations of furniture. A neighbour carted home gifts of old paint and lumber from the garage. My dad and brothers arrived with empty half-tons to pack what we still needed. The mom of one of Chip's friends took the two of you out for lunch and my sister took you both for supper.

In the meantime the skies darkened and hail pelted down. We saved a bowl of larger hailstones for the new owner of our house whose official possession was effective at noon. He had moved in some of his possessions earlier so was lenient with our delayed departure. You were particularly distressed by his mounted deer head resting among the boxes.

Our TV was already packed so we depended on verbal reports via radio from our various helpers. By late evening, the house and garage were empty, the new owner was dealing with his flooded basement, and we retired to my sister's to learn the extent of storm destruction.

The aftermath was three trucks unloaded the next day in my brother's shop – except for the flat-bed whose contents went directly to the newly established Tornado Relief Centre. Give-aways continued as we chose more wisely and packed more compactly from what remained.

Years later, when I returned to Alberta for a visit, I frequently noticed familiar items in family homes and often asked, "Didn't that once belong to me?" Our 1987 departure was truly more dramatic than we ever could have imagined – but only possessions were lost that time. How could I have known ten years later would come the greatest loss?

August 1: Heritage days

1992: A funeral service was held in Calgary for **Cassandra Francis**, age 20. Only four people reportedly attended the service – her parents, her friend Lisa Neve and another relative. Lisa gained infamy later as the second female in Canada to be declared a dangerous offender. She had 22 convictions from age 15 to age 21 and received her designation in 1994. I remember writing a letter on Lisa's behalf (because she had been horribly exploited) long before I knew of her connection with Sandy.

2013: **Shelly Tanis Dene**, age 26, mother of one son, was last seen in Edmonton. She was from Fort McKay First Nation in northern Alberta.

Dear Cara,

1997: August is always a month of mixed emotions, many celebrations overshadowed by deep sorrow. Heritage Days is Edmonton's three-day celebration of cultural diversity where over fifty ethnic pavilions showcase the history, customs, arts and crafts, clothing, music, dance, and food that define their unique traditions. Then comes my birthday and wedding with Will. This is followed by the Fringe, Edmonton's wonderful ten-day festival of amateur theatre.

Yet covering all activities in August is a mantle of mourning. This is the month you were missing, the month I carried on with growing dread, waiting for contact, waiting for an answer.

August 2: "If we only knew..."

1976: The car belonging to **Marie Judy Goudreau**, age 17, from Beaumont south of Edmonton, was found running on a rural road near her home. Two days later Marie was found dead and naked in a water-filled ditch north of Devon. No one was ever charged with her murder although a suspect reportedly committed suicide in 1994 when he was implicated in another murder.

1997: August 2nd was Saturday that year, the last time we spoke.

Hello my little one,

1997: We were home from Nova Scotia almost a week and I tried to contact you every day without success. You finally called maybe late morning, maybe early afternoon, and asked

me for a visit. I declined because of other plans. It seemed so typical that you left me worried for days, then expected me to meet your requests on short demand. You asked if I was coming to court with you in two days and again I said, no, this time you would have to go by yourself.

A story in *Chicken Soup for the Unsinkable Soul* (1999) profoundly touched my heart. “Wind Beneath My Wings” tells of an 18-year-old girl who committed suicide. It was a shock which her mother, Karyl Chastain Beal, struggled to understand. Her words stay with me:

“If we really knew the future, we would alter our behavior profoundly. Since we don’t, however, we simply plod along, oblivious to the fact that disaster may happen at any moment.

If I had known it was [my daughter’s] last day alive... I would have focused on her exclusively. I would have quit my job to spend more time with her. I would have unplugged the telephone and television, so I could listen to her more carefully. I would not have let her out of my sight for even a nanosecond, so I could have savored her presence. Nothing else would have mattered. But I did not know.” (p.189)

And so it is with all of us. We do not know and every day we are called to balance many needs and responsibilities. Nevertheless, we can always choose how we treat each other.

What if I had said, “Cara, I am so worried about you. Of course, I will drop everything and come to visit you right away and maybe even bring you home for a good night’s sleep”? Would that have saved your life that night? Would it have saved your life for the next week or month or year? What would it have taken for you to want to be clean, to enter treatment, and follow through long enough to find a place to live?

Or what if I had said, “Of course, I will visit you because you are important enough to me that I will take every chance I can to make a connection – even if nothing changes – so that you will always know you are loved”? But that is not realistic for normal people trying to hold a job and support themselves. Caring also needs boundaries.

2017: Twenty years later, I received a call from the MMIW National Inquiry about “moving the process along.” I was officially pre-registered to give a statement. Community visits were to be held the first week of September. I had a month to get ready.

August 3: The importance of vigilance

1997: (Sunday) I tried to contact you again without success.

2001: Early in the morning, the charred body of a young woman was found in a dumpster west of downtown Edmonton, a few blocks from where we used to live. She was later identified as **Patricia Lee Belcourt**, age 18. A young man, age 17, who could not be identified as a young offender, was charged with second-degree murder and indignity to human remains. She was beaten and strangled after she resisted his sexual advances.

2016: The government of Canada announced the launch of a National Inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

2017: Now there’s an idea - a Facebook support group, “Hurting Moms, Mending Hearts,” for moms suffering the heartache of a child who is making poor choices.

My dear little girl,

1997: The next day, Sunday, I felt bad about missing you yesterday so called back to the shelter. You were not there. I don’t remember why you said you wouldn’t be with Patch. It was my last day of vacation, rainy and overcast as I recall.

An ominous sign, “Sarah’s Story: A Path to Hell,” was printed in the *Calgary Herald*. It told of a young woman, age 20, who began working the streets at age eleven and became addicted to heroin. It all started with smoking cigarettes and hanging out at malls. Her father was a businessman who spent years fighting for his daughter’s life. Sarah had many escapes and attended many programs, but was always drawn back to the street. Her father’s message was simple: “Be vigilant; it could happen to you.”

2016: I was part of the audience in the grand hall of the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau, Quebec, across the Ottawa River from the parliament buildings, to participate in the launch of the MMIW inquiry. Although not recognized as a family member, my friend Danielle had invited me to accompany her as part of her emotional support.

The credentials of the newly named commissioners were impressive: Marion Buller, British Columbia's first female First Nations provincial court judge in 1994; Michele Audette, former NWAC president and Innu active in Quebec federal politics; Qajaq Robinson, a Nunavut-born civil litigation lawyer; Marilyn Poitras, a Metis law professor at the University of Saskatchewan; and Brian Eyolfson, the lone male, a First Nations lawyer who served on the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario.

Many travelling guests were graciously received at an evening reception that lasted far too long. Three Ministers stood in line to shake hands with all present. Unfortunately, Patty Hadju, then Minister of Status of Women, looked startled when I mentioned I'd mailed her a copy of the book *Paid For*, which I hoped she had received and would have time to read.

August 4: Where are you?

1997: (Monday) **Where are you?** You were not at the shelter when I went to pick you up for supper. The workers said they had not seen you. We hadn't confirmed but it had been our pattern for months to meet on Mondays so I took my chances.

Dear Cara,

1997: Will's brother was visiting and they were surprised to see me home so soon after not finding you. It was odd for you to miss getting together, but not totally out of character.

2016: Danielle Boudreau, activist and founder of the Memorial March of Edmonton, was interviewed by the *Edmonton Sun* regarding the upcoming inquiry. She originally opposed the

\$50 million budget, believing the money could be better spent on educating young people and providing life skills, but warmed to the idea of acknowledging people's lives and experiences. How or if this inquiry will really make a difference is a concern for many citizens, although it seems important to many that our collective loss is recognized.

August 5: "Reality" of our situations

1997: (Tuesday) Still no contact. This is rather strange. I spoke with someone from Student Legal Services who was at court this morning. She said she'd spoken with you last week and you were not accepting the "reality of your situation" and the shelter reported you had "pretty bad track marks." I wondered if you were afraid and hiding out. A warrant was to be issued for your arrest because of your non-appearance.

1998: **Lisa Taodora Kopf**, age 17, was found floating face down in a west-end slough by a farmer checking livestock. Police said there was no evidence of foul play although it was suspicious she was found in a field after attending a party. An autopsy revealed the cause of death to be suffocation. Lisa moved with her mom and sister to Edmonton from Victoria, B.C., in 1997 after the girls' father was killed by a drunk driver. She worked at a local McDonalds and was described as trusting, happy, and always smiling.

2017: The body of **Nicole Brendan Robar**, age 21, was pulled from the Lesser Slave River north of Edmonton. She was last seen in Spruce Grove on July 14. A man and woman were charged with second-degree murder.

Dear Cara,

1997: I did not attend your court appearance and neither did you. Presumably a warrant for your arrest would have been requested.

In his commentary "A Crime against Families," Peter Stockland, columnist with the *Calgary Herald*, spoke of the devastation caused by sexual exploitation:

"In plain language, the man who buys a juvenile prostitute commits both a moral outrage against his victim AND against all those to whom she is a niece, a daughter, a sister; all those who love her, however imperfectly; all those she would instinctively protect from whatever source of shame she hides.

It might seem overly obvious to point out how that makes utter nonsense of the claim that prostitution is a victimless crime. Yet there is no fault in describing the overly obvious to the wilfully blind on the off-chance it might help them see.”

2017: What an apt description of what has become my life work – explaining the obvious to those who do not see. I know that not all blindness is malicious and can only hope that some will see with new eyes.

August 6: National Friendship Day

1997: (Wednesday) **STILL NO CONTACT...** This does not feel right.

1997: The body of **Carol Meredith**, age 29, was found. She had been abducted a week earlier by her estranged husband.

2011: **Carol King**, (no relation) age 40, from Newfoundland three years earlier, disappeared from her farm near Herschel in central Saskatchewan. Her car was found in a slough August 10 and her remains in a wooded area August 27. A former boyfriend, age 53, was charged with first-degree murder five years later in 2016.

Dear Cara,

2005: It seems there is always a memorial somewhere in the world. Today’s paper told the story of Misako Tachibana, one of 25 token women chosen for cosmetic surgery to repair the scars of burned flesh ten years after the 1945 atomic bomb on Hiroshima, when she was 15 years old. Now 75, sixty years later, she felt duty-bound to tell her story and speak out against war. “I am not an activist but I would like to plead for peace... I pray that I don’t face this twice in a lifetime.”

2016: The *Globe and Mail* story “Monsters in our Midst” reviewed Edmonton’s history with murdered and missing women. RCMP Project KARE was formed in October 2003 to address the multiple murders of the Edmonton area and hopefully provide a better response than Vancouver had years earlier. Project KARE included a Pro-Active Team tasked to develop

rapport with street involved persons and encourage them to register their personal information and to provide a few strands of hair for DNA samples. This service continued to 2014

Of the 49 cases the *Globe* examined, 38 remained unsolved with one not-guilty verdict. That was a solve rate of only 22%, compared to nearly 90% the RCMP claimed between 1980 and 2012. It was noted, however, murders are more difficult to solve when perpetrators are not known to their victims and investigations are handicapped by long delays before bodies are found and evidence lost to decomposition. That was not a surprise.

August 7: “You never forget”

1997: (Thursday) **Still no contact and I would like to find you!** I phoned a nurse at the shelter. She had not seen you and said she would keep her eyes open. I phoned Kindred House, a drop-in center for women and trans-gendered people working on the streets. You were not there.

2005: **Theresa Merrie Innes**, age 36, mother of one son, was last seen in High Level. She was found May 7, 2010, stuffed in a hockey bag in a Fort Saskatchewan garage. Two years later, Thomas Svekla was convicted of second-degree murder in May 2008.

2017: **Deanna Noname**, age 55, died in police custody after being arrested the day before. She had been diagnosed with COPD but did not have her oxygen tank with her.

Darling Cara,

2015: This week was the annual summer barbeque held by “Victims of Homicide,” an amazing support group. It’s important for family members of murdered loved ones to have a place they can meet others who share similar loss. Many survivors feel ostracized, overwhelmed with media and police investigations, and left alone to deal with their grief.

The group in Edmonton was founded by Joyce and Noel Farion following the shooting of their 17-year-old son Scott in 1994. It was inspired by and patterned after “Parents of Murdered Children” in the United States. Joyce was watching a program on TV about the American group

and decided Edmonton needed similar support. She contacted several parents named in the media who had recently lost children to violent deaths. Family members began to meet in the Farions' home and slowly over time, the group developed a more formal structure and recognition in the community.

The barbeque was enjoyed by extended family members, such as grandchildren who do not attend meetings and are an exuberant sign of life continuing. At the other end of life's spectrum, I chatted with a gracious 90-year-old lady whose grandson was murdered. She told me she also lost a son at birth 71 years earlier. "You never forget," she said simply.

August 8: National Happiness Day

1997: (Friday) Six days since I spoke with you, four days since I went to pick you up and you weren't there, three days since you were supposed to be in court. I wonder if you are hiding. **This is a long time for you not to phone.**

2015: **Tina Michelle Fontaine**, age 15, disappeared from downtown Winnipeg. She was in the care of Children's Services and ran away from the hotel where she was being housed. Her body was found eight days later, in the Red River, wrapped in a bag. Tina was from the Sagkeeng First Nation, northeast of Winnipeg.

Dear Cara,

2005: I spoke with a dear old friend for his 80th birthday. He sounded well. When asked about a good time for a visit, he said simply "Oh, any time January through December." The warmth and gracious acceptance from people like him are a gift.

An *Edmonton Journal* article titled "Letting Go of Anger" contained helpful insights such as "anger can undermine our ability to enjoy inner peace, solve problems, and feel good." Most of us recognize that. Learning how to manage our anger is more difficult. It is not enough to read lists of helpful tips; continual rehearsal is required to release negative energy. We need to understand the emotional pain that precedes an angry response and to identify what needs or

values are being thwarted. After cooling down, we can take time to address the core issues and develop a plan of action to meet our needs in a more healthy and productive manner.

August 9: Peace Keepers Day

1997: (Saturday) A week has passed since we talked... ENOUGH ALREADY OF NOT KNOWING - WHERE ARE YOU?

Dear Cara,

1997: I made my first call to Edmonton City Police for what I thought was a “missing person” report. They said they had no record of a warrant for you and suggested I try the city cells and the hospitals. I was so frustrated. I knew if you were conscious and in hospital, you would call and I couldn’t quite imagine any hospital providing information on unidentified patients. Wouldn’t the police be involved if people were admitted unconscious with no ID? Or would there not be some media attention to find a next of kin? I wonder if the officer who spoke to me really thought he was being helpful.

Surely, the police also knew city cells would not confirm if someone was being held. There were other ways of finding out, as I learned previously, but that was not explained.

August 10: Tempered optimism – Prisoner’s Justice Day in Canada

1997: (Sunday) MISSING DAY #8. I phoned the Women’s Emergency Shelter again. They said they had no record of you being there recently. Again, I was sure you would have called if you were there unless you had come in just to sleep.

2017: A round dance was held at the Alberta legislature in honour of Indigenous inmates and to raise awareness about their over-representation in Canadian prisons. More than a quarter of federal inmates are Indigenous and in the Prairies provinces, they make up nearly half the federal prison population. (CBC News)

Dear Cara,

2005: Evening news reported that Project KARE was receiving another ten officers. A reporter called shortly afterwards for my opinion. I said I thought it was wonderful they would have more help because City Police did nothing to look for missing women. The reporter said Project KARE didn't seem to be making much progress. I replied, "Who would know? They choose not to be forthcoming." My irritability seemed to be increasing. Maybe it was the time of year. August was always a hard month.

August 11: Lifestyle negates "missing"?

1997: (Monday) **MISSING DAY #9**. I contacted the shelter again. Someone said they would post a message. I phoned several other agencies with no success.

2003: **Jody Nicole Umperville**, age 24, mother of five, died at the Edmonton Remand Centre two days after her arrest. A provincial court inquiry heard she was held in a medical unit and prescribed various drugs to ease her withdrawal symptoms.

2008: Human remains found in an isolated bushy area outside Saskatoon were identified as **Daleen Bosse**, a 25-year-old student and mother of one missing for over four years. Daleen was last seen at a Saskatoon nightclub May 18, 2004. Her body had been set on fire. A 30-year-old man was charged with first-degree murder.

My dear little Cara,

1997: I called Patch a couple times before he answered. He said he hadn't heard from you for about a week, that he kicked you out when you started using drugs again. He was working on the rigs out of town. He said you talked about going to Vancouver, you once said you loved heroin, it was worse than cocaine because people lose track of time, and the only food you ever had was when I bought it. He suggested several hotels as possible places to try.

I called the Edmonton City Police again. They said an "assist to locate" could be put on the system. I was also told the warrant for your arrest had not been processed, you could be in another city, a "missing person" report would be no advantage unless you came to police

attention, and they weren't sure you could be considered "missing" because of your lifestyle. The lessons of Vancouver were not yet acknowledged in Edmonton.

August 12: National Youth Day

1997: (Tuesday) **MISSING DAY #10**. I spoke with a man from Street Works, the needle exchange program. He said he was not allowed to tell me who they saw. People only gave their initials when they picked up needles. He knew most of the girls on the street, he said, but had no useful information. I spoke with Crossroads. They said they knew what you looked like, that I could leave your picture with house staff.

Dear Cara,

1982: A cousin died and I remember the poignancy of his death. He was a troubled young man, abused by his alcoholic father yet adopted his name for reasons I did not understand. Perhaps it was his attempt to change history or to transform his own memories. He struggled with addictions and often stayed with my parents, as had his father before him. My siblings called him H.P. for "Honest" Pete to distinguish him from his namesake. H.P. died from drowning and was grieved by members of a newly found church community as well as his birth family. It was a synopsis of a sad life followed by a sad death, with loss inherent in both.

2005: Will and I volunteered, as we often do, at a fundraising casino. This time we were money counters. It was disconcerting to have such large amounts of cash pass through our hands in one evening, and hard to believe this was just one casino on one night in one city in the world. With so many people struggling financially, it is incomprehensible to see that much money randomly discarded. It is small consolation that government allows a token percentage to be made available to charities in lieu of direct funding, not that charities aren't extremely grateful. Part of my personal service is to participate in casinos that support the good work of non-profit agencies in our community.

August 13: Garden of remembrance

1997: (Wednesday) YOU ARE STILL MISSING. THIS IS DAY #11.

My dear Cara,

2004: A public ceremony dedicated and unveiled a small memorial garden for women who lost their lives on the streets of Edmonton. The garden is tucked away in a corner on the riverbank, behind an old school which now houses an inner city support agency.

The morning began with a smudge ceremony and blessing of the plants with cedar branches dipped in water. Healing herbs and hardy plants native to Alberta were chosen to provide a living and lasting legacy to the women who now live only in memories.

I was asked to speak and these are some of my words:

“Blessed are all those who are remembered here.

I am honoured and humbled to have been asked to dedicate this garden today in memory of many beautiful young women who died as a result of their street involvement. They were our daughters, our sisters, our nieces, our cousins, our friends, and for some, even our mothers. They were part of a world many of us do not understand, a world where we could not follow. The tragedy of their loss continues to cast a shadow over our society...

The garden is a welcome step in restoring a dignity that was often denied in their life and even in their death. A garden represents the cycles of life. We begin as mere seeds, an image in the mind of our Creator, we draw strength from the sun and rain, and we do not know how much time we will have before we are called to return to the earth. All we can do is choose to live today the best way we know how...

May this garden be a source of honour and blessing for those who have gone ahead and a reminder to us left behind of the work that still needs to be done. May our combined energies be like the proverbial butterfly wings that create winds of change, blessing the world with gentleness and peace.

There is a Native American legend which states that butterflies can carry whispered wishes to the Great Spirit in the Sky. The spirits of our departed sisters have already been set free to soar like the butterflies.”

August 14: Annual memorial service

1997: (Thursday) YOU ARE STILL MISSING - DAY #12. I left a poster with Street Works and Crossroads and drove around the city streets. A girl approached my van with a big smile when I stopped but turned away quickly with fear in her eyes when I asked if she knew you. I wondered about her secrets and didn't want to add to her obvious terror.

1997: **Ethel Pelletier**, age 30, died of a stab wound in Edmonton, a man charged with second-degree murder. I wonder if either of you were known to the girl on the street.

Dear Cara,

2000: Three years after your death, Edmonton hosted the first annual memorial dedicated to all who had lost their lives through sexual exploitation. As it was a private function, there was no media coverage. However, I felt the service deserved recognition so wrote a letter which was published in the *Edmonton Journal* Letters page on August 20:

“Mourning the victims of social tragedy”

August 14, 2000 marked the first memorial in Edmonton for women who had lost their lives through involvement in street prostitution.

This day was first chosen by people in Calgary to remember Karen Lewis, a 17-year-old woman who was murdered in 1994. The tragedy of her death sparked public outrage and continues to inspire many community members to take action.

Edmonton's private memorial was planned by people who have lost family members and friends. Groups working on prostitution issues assisted with costs, and local businesses contributed refreshments.

I was privileged to speak at the memorial and would like to share some of my reflections with a wider audience:

“As the roll call is read, we remember over 40 women who have been sacrificed in the Edmonton area alone. Over a third were murdered and most of these murders remain unsolved. We also remember those who have died from addictions, suicide, and disease as a result of their street involvement.

These women were victims at many levels. Some were lured into street life because it seemed to offer a sense of belonging or independence they did not feel at home. They did not deserve to die, yet there were few resources to help them live.

We cannot overlook that the sex trade and the drug trade are funded and perpetuated by ‘johns,’ men who line up all over the world to buy sex from disadvantaged women and children. The sex trade is a consumer driven industry and as long as there are consumers, there will be other greedy men taking advantage of the money exchanged...

We who have been wounded must hear and believe that we have a right to be healed, even though healing often feels like a betrayal. We each strive in our own way to make sense of our loss and to honour the memory of our departed loved ones.

If we listen, perhaps we can still hear their voices: **‘We are no longer in the ditch or the alley or the field or the trunk of your car. We are not even on the street corner. We are now present in the sun that shines, the stars that twinkle in the sky, the wind that blows, and the rain and snow that fall upon the Earth. We have been transformed. Let the memory of our short lives be used for good so others can enjoy the peace and freedom that we were denied.’**

May our departed sisters rest in peace as their spirit carries us forward.”

August 15: Another memorial talk

1997: (Friday) YOU ARE STILL MISSING - DAY #13.

Dear little Cara,

2003: Another year another mother gave the memorial talk. Some of her words include:

“I am the mother of *Kelly Dawn Reilly* who was killed two and a half years ago. She was only 23 years of age, a young beautiful woman and the mother of two children. She was a friend and a sister. To me she was my little girl, my baby.

I last saw my daughter on Sunday, January 14th and reported her missing at 10 o’clock the following night. I knew something was wrong. Trying to report a woman missing who happens to be in a high-risk lifestyle and getting the City Police to act quickly is virtually IMPOSSIBLE. It happens too often that reports are not taken seriously until after a body is found. ...

We are honouring many women here today. It is a great tragedy that so many of them died as a result of murder. The papers say that they were easy targets – they were weak and vulnerable and often were not reported missing by anyone. I disagree whole-heartedly with this statement.

I think women need a strong constitution to be able to endure all the criticism they get, and they need strength to stand out there in all kinds of harsh weather and to put up with a lot of stupid, ugly, drunk old men. That takes amazing tolerance. I couldn't handle it.

The Law also needs to stop protecting JOHNS. They should be identified, names given to the media, BAD DATES put on the Internet. EXPOSE THEM!!

The media can be cruel but I remember a constable telling me that anytime Kelly is mentioned in the paper or on television, they get a few phone tips. So I keep doing interviews because I never know maybe that one little tip will maybe lead to a big one that will solve the case.”

Yes, that is another reason we keep going. There is always the hope that extra publicity will trigger a memory, or a twinge of conscience, in someone somewhere and a new tip will lead to further investigation and possible resolution.

August 16: No “balance” in exploitation

1983: The body of **Delaine Goudriann**, age 13, youngest of four siblings, missing since July 14, was found in a field north of Edmonton. The family had moved from Hinton the year before. Delaine's death was ruled a homicide although the cause of death could not be determined. Police say the case is reviewed regularly.

(Reported by the *Edmonton Sun*, October 29, 2017)

1997: (Saturday) **YOU ARE STILL MISSING - DAY #14.**

2011: **Dana Turner**, age 31, was last seen in Edmonton. Her body was found almost two months later.

Dear Cara,

2015: Societal attitudes change very slowly. As recently as 2008, the Edmonton Police Service website announced they chose a “balanced” approach in targeting both the buyers and sellers of sexual services. That was in keeping with the legislation of the time and intended to remove activity from the streets, reducing the inevitable drug and gang involvement. First-time male offenders had the opportunity of attending “john school” to learn the extent of harm caused

by their behaviours while female offenders had the opportunity of attending individualized programs through COARSE (Creating Options Aimed at Reducing Sexual Exploitation.)

Although the website acknowledged that many of those exploited became involved by force (pimped, coerced, trafficked) or for survival (poverty, homelessness, addiction), the focus of intervention was neighbourhood safety. While community building is commendable, it would be nice if supports (housing, treatment, resources) were included to assist survivors rather than banish them.

New federal legislation, the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act, assented November 6, 2014, radically changed this perspective by criminalizing the purchase of sexual services. While many municipalities across Canada seem reluctant to enforce that protection, we can only hope compliance will evolve with time.

August 17: “Mom, you worry too much”

1997: (Sunday) YOU ARE STILL MISSING - DAY #15.

2014: The body of **Tina Fontaine**, age 15, was recovered from the Red River in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She was missing since August 9 and found wrapped in a plastic bag. Tina’s murder resulted in the creation of a volunteer group “Drag the Red” which regularly searches portions of the Red River for bodies or evidence. A 53-year-old man was charged with second-degree murder in December 2015.

Dear Cara,

1997: At some point during this long wait, you appeared to me in a dream. You entered my room and stood by my bed waiting for me to wake up. “Cara, where have you been?” I exclaimed, reaching out for you, “I’ve been so worried.” “Oh mom,” you replied, stepping back from my intended embrace, “you worry too much.” That was my sign you were really gone and wherever you were, it was somehow okay.

August 18: World Humanitarian Day - an exceptional birthday gift

1997: (Monday) MISSING DAY #16.

2010: **Amber Alyssa Tucarro**, age 21, was reported missing from a motel near Nisku, south of Edmonton. The Leduc RCMP removed Amber from their missing persons list after one month, despite no one seeing her, and destroyed property seized from her room. Amber's mother, Vivian, later filed an official complaint which led to "changes in policies and procedures." Amber's remains were found September 1, 2012.

Cara, my precious darling,

1997: I spoke with a fellow from Street Works who told me some people saw you last week at a downtown hotel. I called the hotel and was asked to call back after 10 p.m. to talk to another staff. That fellow said you had been barred since last winter for fighting too much. Oh dear, that was news to me. I called another hotel. They thought someone saw you about a week ago. I met up with Patch. He'd been talking to a few girls and nobody knew anything.

I don't remember how I got through my birthday that year. I met Will at the bus depot after his road trip with his brother. His gift to me was a stuffed brown bear from Utah, the spirit animal of Harvest Moon. Neither of us realized its significance at the time.

One day many months after you died, when I was feeling particularly unworthy at having been your mother, I came across the birthday card you gave me two years earlier. You said you cried when you read it, so you knew it was the right one.

That Blue Mountain Arts card, signed "with lots of love always," remains one of my most treasured gifts and I certainly hope the sentiments remained true for you over the last two difficult years of your life:

For your birthday, Mom,
if I could give you the world, I would.
If there were a gift to say
"thank you" for how well you raised me,
I would send it.
But I don't think there could ever be

anything I could give or say
to equal the love and gratitude I feel for you.
I hope that our relationship shows
how much I treasure you,
and how much your words of wisdom
and support mean to me.

Every day, I thank God for you.
I love your smile, and your hug
that makes everything seem better.
I love the way you've touched my life,
How you've always been a part of it.
I love you, Mom,
and I carry your love in my heart every day
for strength and guidance and courage.
It fills me with pride and joy
to have you as my mother.

I think in twenty years that was the first time you spontaneously bought me a card and one of the few times in your adult life you demonstrated a depth of altruism - a miracle.



August 19: Wedding celebration

1997: (Tuesday) MISSING DAY #17.

Dear Cara,

1995: On the day Will and I married, you managed to appear in time for your scheduled hair appointment. Your clothes were ready and waiting at the house.

Our wedding was a wonderful day. From the big red double-decker bus to an evening of dinner and dancing, everything was magical. The bus idea was borrowed from a wedding we attended earlier in the summer. Rental was a four hour minimum and we decided to share the ride with forty friends and family.

Our ceremony was held at a New Age church that I joined after my move back to Alberta. By amazing coincidence, the building was previously a Catholic church where you were baptized 21 years earlier. I also remember attending there with my aunt when I was only six years old and it was newly constructed. The homily was about whether little girls should be allowed to bring their dolls to church. As I recall, the consensus was affirmative because it modelled good parenting. You and I later lived down the block. The circle of life returned twenty years later when my New Age affiliation purchased the church as their spiritual home.

A quick change in the back of the church (from bus-riding clothes to my dress in a bag) and I was ready for my grand entrance. One of my little niece flower-girls asked what to do if she tired of standing. I told her she could sit on the altar steps and sure enough, several minutes into the service, she nudged her sister to sit down with her. You were happy to walk down the aisle as one of my bridesmaids but stayed with Patch the rest of the evening. My parents generously agreed to share a double room overnight with you and Patch.

August 20: Life is full of choices

1997: (Wednesday) MISSING DAY #18. I contacted another hotel. Someone said you had not been there recently.

2015: A woman found dead in a central Edmonton yard was identified as **Lan (Lana) Cam Kasjaniuk**, age 51. Her death was considered suspicious although no further information was released except that she had previous convictions related to sexual exploitation. Presumably, that was from a time victimized women were charged.

Dear Cara,

2005: We had so much fun at our post-wedding open house that we decided to do it again for our 10th anniversary. On the day of the big party, our first guests arrived shortly after 3 p.m. and we had a wonderful evening until a final family showed up after 11:30 p.m. They were living in their own little world and partied on without us. Will initially locked the garage to limit access to wood for the fire pit, then decided on second thought opened it again in case they started burning furniture.

An article in the *Edmonton Journal* suggested that letting go of life's disappointments was easier said than done – as if I didn't know. What we can change, it said, is our response where we are stuck. Hmm, I never realized grief and grievance have a common root. Thoughts to consider were: “Letting go is an active and ongoing choice” and “Suffering is caused by the mind and can be transcended the same way.”

August 21: How the brain processes trauma

1997: (Thursday) **MISSING DAY #19.**

2010: The body of **Jacqueline Bruno**, age 18, was found washed up on the beach of Birch Lake. She was last seen earlier that morning leaving a party on Alexis First Nation northwest of Edmonton. Police ruled her death suspicious.

Cara darling,

2001: Edmonton was fortunate to host the annual NOVA conference, usually held in the United States. The National Organization for Victim Assistance was founded in 1975 to promote rights and services for those harmed by crime and crisis everywhere.

One presentation was “How the Brain Processes Trauma” by Dr. Marlene Young. In a simplified summary, she described a physiological order to the range of emotions we feel after a

trauma. Fear is followed by anger, confusion, guilt, shame, and grief. Guilt is the consequence of no natural reason. We need reasons so the mind comes up with an entire range of improbabilities. “If only... if only... if only...” as we strive for some understanding. Shame is complicated because society often blames victims. Grief is the result of any loss.

We need structure and validation to re-establish our own security. We need to interpret life in order to ensure our survival. We need to generate a story. Words help us manage the emotional over-ride. Remembering in the present allows us to establish what happened was in the past, so we can move along the time continuum to possible hope in the future. We anticipate a new story that will fit our life.

August 22: How wide and how far?

1997: (Friday) **MISSING DAY #20.**

2001: **Shawna Lee Bird**, age 16, mother of a young daughter, was fatally beaten. She was from the Paul Band near Duffield in central Alberta. Three youths were charged with second-degree murder.

“My friends, love is better than anger. Hope is better than fear. Optimism is better than despair. So let us be loving, hopeful, and optimistic. And we’ll change the world.”

Jack Layton (July 18, 1950 – August 22, 2011)

Dear Cara,

1996: In terrible premonition of a morbid reality that would too soon become part of my life, the *Edmonton Journal* provided a major expose of Asian flesh trade. The victimization of Asian women and girls was described as a multi-billion dollar business with an international scope. Reporter Jonathan Manthorpe described “a horrific trade in humanity, not been matched since the mass abduction of Africans to labour on pioneer farms in the Americas in the 18th and

19th centuries.” Exploitation was believed to be a \$27 billion a year business in Thailand, two-thirds of the national budget provided by enslaved women lured from poor villages.

One would like to think such exposes are relatively new. To my surprise, while doing research for my mother on the *Sphere Magazine* from England, I came across a 1902 headline “The Inquiry into Child Trading.” The *Sphere* was first published in 1900 to reach British citizens living in the colonies. Even then the topic was not new, included with many other articles on sports, celebrities, politics, zoo animals, Christmas festivities, the occasional saint, and alternate work for women such as factories and coal mines.

Harvest Moon, in the Medicine Wheel tradition, teaches good judgement and justice, to understand secret regions of the heart and soul, and to analyze. This moon helps develop confidence and balance, work and duty. The Power Animal for Harvest moon is the brown bear, like my birthday gift.

August 23: Harvest Moon

1997: (Saturday) MISSING DAY #21.

Dear Cara,

1997: I phoned Edmonton City Police again about you being missing and was told there was no concern without evidence of foul play. I spoke with Crossroads again. The outreach worker said you completed a High Risk Registry on July 2 and that you tried to come into the Safe House a couple times. He mentioned he would put out the word in Saskatoon, Calgary, and Vancouver. Good, he seemed to have more connections that I did.

It is the most terrible thing imaginable to have a child go missing. The month became a nightmare as the time stretched on with no contact. I phoned your friends; your friends phoned me. I drove around the city streets a few evenings before accepting the futility of that plan. As weeks went by, I found my eyes constantly probing alleys and ditches in search of clues.

August 24: Missing in so many ways

1997: (Sunday) YOU ARE STILL MISSING - DAY #22.

“Sarah, my beloved sister, loved by many more as well, May you always know somehow and somewhere that you are loved, that you always were.”

Maggie de Vries in *Missing Sarah* (2003, p.206)

Dear Cara,

2003: Edmonton Journal featured a review of Maggie de Vries’ book about her sister, *Missing Sarah* (2003) and I caught the double impact of the word “missing.” *Sarah de Vries*, age 23, was last seen in downtown Victoria April 14, 1998, her disappearance unnoticed by few outside her family until traces of her DNA were found on Robert Pickton’s farm.

Missing Sarah is a sad book about a young woman who was missing without a trace for over two years. Maggie de Vries described her heartache as her younger adopted sister sank into a lost and lonely world. Sarah too was a gifted writer and Maggie’s reflections are interspersed with Sarah’s own words (p.233-234):

“Woman’s body found beaten beyond recognition.
You sip your coffee
Taking a drag of your smoke
Turning the page
Taking a bite of your toast
Just another day
Just another death
Just one more thing you so easily forget...
For nobody special from your world is gone...
She was a broken-down angel
A child lost with not place
A human being in disguise...”

Sarah was one of the many young women who disappeared from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside over 20 years. Like you, she became more troubled through her adolescence and found escape in the dangerous world of the streets. Her DNA was identified in August 2002.

August 25: “Now we wait for a body”

1997: (Monday) STILL MISSING - DAY #23.

2008: Skeletal remains were found straddling a tree line by a farmer working his field just south of Fort Saskatchewan. They were identified October 30 as **Alexander Xavier Smith**, a 14-year-old boy who vanished from his grandmother’s home two months earlier, on June 28. The area was a known dumping ground.

“Police didn’t consider his disappearance suspicious because of his high risk lifestyle,” a Youth Emergency shelter worker explained. “Young people are typically defined as high-risk if they lack the strong positive supports needed to keep their lives out of danger. They are often away from home and their lifestyle makes them vulnerable to exploitation, from gang recruitment and drug abuse to prostitution... The wrong kind of people will befriend them.”

2015: Youth care worker **Nadine Skow**, age 38, was found stabbed and mutilated. Her former boyfriend was charged with second-degree murder and indignity to a human body after what was described as a gruesome and horrific killing.

Dear Cara,

1997: I spoke again with Edmonton City Police and was told there was no “missing person” file and even with an outstanding warrant, there would be no reason to arrest you outside of Alberta. There was no record of my previous calls. I was told that I needed to speak to the Communications people and tell them specifically I wanted to complete a “missing person” report. Finally, sixteen days after my first call, I was given a file number: 97-84611. Naively expecting this would ensure some proactive investigation, I asked, “Okay, now what happens?” The chilling response, “Now we wait for a body.”

As long as I live, I will never forget that insensitive remark and, as long as I live, I will urge police departments to respond with more compassion to distraught family members. If no protocol exists for follow-up, one would expect an officer to at least say, “I’m sorry... This is our policy...” It is totally incomprehensible that persons identified as having “high-risk” lifestyles are given less credibility when they disappear. No wonder such crimes are so difficult to solve.

August 26: Women's Equality Day - Three best memories?

1997: (Tuesday) MISSING DAY #24

2006: **Stephanie Stewart**, age 70, disappeared from a fire tower near Hinton, where she worked the last 13 summers. One might think an elderly lady could accidentally fall in the woods but RCMP considered her disappearance a homicide. Years later it was revealed that her blood was found in the tower. Stephanie has not yet been found.

Dear Cara,

2005: Tonight at a “cocktails on the patio” party with friends, the ladies were discussing childhood experiences. Our hostess told stories of her mistreatment as an adopted child raised by very rigid parents. She tried to keep peace with them for years until one day someone asked her if she could remember three happy memories from her childhood. She decided to stop trying when she realized she could not.

Another asked if I had three happy memories and I replied probably not, at least with my immediate family. My early years were spent in my room reading and entertaining myself with imaginary playmates. My mother seemed to be a misplaced “prima donna” who never enjoyed her life on the farm with no amenities and too many children. She might have been happy married to a rich man if all she had to do was play music and enjoy her hobbies. For the most part, I felt resented and at best tolerated growing up in that filthy crowded house.

“Perhaps that was unfair,” I thought, so searched for three happy memories. My mother, a teacher at heart, once made a picture of the big dipper for me on a piece of dark paper with shiny stick-on stars. She explained how one side of the dipper always points to the north star, which always stays in the same place while the other stars rotate around it and how that helped early explorers keep track of their directions. I remember her playing the piano with my dad singing “Happy Birthday” when I was sixteen. That was bitter-sweet because I had dreams of a magical sweet sixteen party instead of being stuck on the farm doing nothing. That gesture

probably came from my dad because he seemed to try at times. He congratulated me once for winning an award, which was gratifying because of the personal recognition, instead of my mother acting like it was her due.

Dear Cara, I wonder what your best three memories are... I can only guess.

August 27: Suicide strikes

1997: (Wednesday) MISSING DAY # 25.

Dear Cara,

1970: Suicide touched my life with the death of a younger cousin. She was only 17 and her troubles were unknown to me. I enjoyed visiting her family and staying in the city as a break from life on the farm. Her parents were teachers, well respected in their profession and community, and the family lived an orderly life in a middle-class neighborhood. And yet this beautiful young woman with a bright inquisitive mind ended her life very decisively. She shot herself under the back stairs of their pleasant bungalow when her mother stepped out briefly to buy a birthday cake for her father.

I quit my summer job a day early to attend her funeral before returning to university. My lasting memory is the living room overflowing with flowers. For years I disliked basements and was haunted by cupboards under stairs. The irony of the tragedy stayed with me in wondering about a family curse. Two conscientious parents, who touched the hearts and minds of many students over the years, were unable to reach their own daughter. Likewise, my own professional training was not enough to save you.

1997: I was beginning to feel desperate about no investigation and contacted the local street paper *Our Voice* with a request to do a story about you being missing. I will never forget

the kindness of the editor, Keith Wylie, who explained the September issue had already gone to press but promised he would do a story for October if you were still missing. I talked to the police about offering a reward for information but they told me they didn't get involved with advertising unless through Crime Stoppers.

August 28: After life?

1997: (Thursday) MISSING DAY #26.

2003: **Debbie Darlene Lake**, age 29, mother of four, was identified as the woman whose skull was found near Miquelon Lake four months earlier by a man looking for antlers. Debbie, missing since November 4, 2002, was described as trusting and happy-go-lucky. (See April 12.)

Dear Cara,

2005: Reading for the day was about the “brain” in our gut, also known as the enteric nervous system under the *Edmonton Journal* headline: “Butterflies and Our ‘Second Brain’.” This brings new credibility to people who talk about “gut feelings” or those who say “trust your gut.” A churning burning feeling is an indication that something is wrong, and not necessarily what we ate. The enteric system manages every aspect of digestion and is linked to emotional health. For example, serotonin is a neuro-transmitter crucial to feeling of well-being and 95% of the body's serotonin is stored in the gut.

John Edward's book *After Life: Answers from the Other Side* (2003) also provided a few thoughts worth repeating:

“One of the things that I have to tell you is that I believe the only way to get back the love that you have, the unconditional love as a parent for this child, is to honor that grief... Because grief is the other side of love. (p.33)

Your daughter is larger than [her death]. The death happened in a minute, but her life was a lot longer than that... And the love you have for her and the love she has for you is still very much here and alive.

[She] is still connected to you, and she's counting on you... All of us must remember this when we lose someone we love. Cry, then pick yourself up bravely, because they're watching over us and hoping we'll do well during the rest of our years here, fulfilling whatever destiny we have." (p.43-44)

August 29: Multiple traumas

1997: (Friday) MISSING DAY # 27

1998: **Lara Danielle Brown**, age 26, was last seen in Edmonton and reported missing by a friend.

1998: **April Lambert**, age 12, disappeared from the Bushie Reserve in northern Alberta. She was found over a month later near High Level. A man was charged with second-degree murder and convicted of manslaughter in 2000. He claimed to have accidentally run over her before burning her body.

Dear Cara,

2005: In world news, the city of New Orleans was bracing for a monster storm, as Hurricane Katrina barrelled across the Gulf of Mexico from South Florida to Louisiana with winds up to 265 km/hr. Oil refinery operations in the region were in danger plus the already below sea-level city was threatened with serious flooding. Hundreds of thousands of residents had been evacuated and others were taking refuge in the 70,000-seat Superdome. It was hard to imagine personal trauma multiplied so many times.

August 30: Numbness in my soul

1997: (Saturday) MISSING DAY #28

2004: **Shirley Lynn Allwright**, age 43, was found in a tent in an inner-city Calgary park by city maintenance workers. She had recently moved into a short-term unit under the Mustard Seed's housing program to prepare her for finding a home of her own.

Dear Cara,

1997: A dark numbness settled in my soul, a sense that my life would continue in the same kind of parallel universe in which I lived the last few years. It was hard when people asked how you were and I would say you were in hospital... or living with friends... or still struggling... Seldom did I mention in jail... or worse things that I could not even imagine. Now I said simply, "Cara is missing... I don't know where she is ..."

August 31: The morning of mourning

1997: (Sunday) MISSING DAY #29

1997: Morning news that **Princess Diana**, age 36, mother of two young boys, died after a car crash in a Paris tunnel in the early hours of August 31 signaled a day of shock and denial for the whole world. I wondered about the strangeness of dying in a tunnel until we travelled to Paris the next year and learned many streets were underground. Many conspiracy theories have persisted, none proven. The legacy of her beauty, enigmatic presence, and compassion will never be forgotten.

2017: **Valerie Maurice**, age 29, was found strangled to death in a north Edmonton apartment. Friends said she was being controlled by a pimp. She was from Montreal and frequently visited "clients" in Alberta. A man, age 49, was later arrested in Vancouver and charged with second-degree murder. He was previously convicted of threatening to kill an Edmonton escort.

Dear Cara, my little friend,

1997: Sunday is traditionally a day of rest and reflection. I had not seen you for almost two months and had no contact for over four weeks. Yes, you appeared with the message that you had passed to another dimension. Still the uncertainty was unnerving. My prayers for so long were that you would find a happy home and now I wondered if that meant not on this earth. I longed to know you were at peace and dreaded confirmation. The news of Princess Diana was enough shock for the day.

September 1: Missing a month

1997: (Monday) MISSING DAY #30. I did not learn until next evening that your body was found in a field near Sherwood Park.

2012: Horseback riders found partial skeletal remains of **Amber Alyssa Tucarro** in a farmer's field near Leduc, south of Edmonton. Amber, mother of one son, was 21 when disappeared two years earlier.

2016: Nineteen years after your death, five Commissioners officially began the National Inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Girls and Women of Canada. The emotional well-being of families with lost loved one was to be at the heart of the inquiry.

Dear Cara,

1997: The month you were missing was probably the longest month of my life. Your body lay decomposing in a field, ravaged by wind, rain, sun, insects and animals while hundreds of people drove by without noticing. It was probably just as well that I missed the news that evening about an unidentified body found.

2016: Nineteen years after you were found, the mandate of the national inquiry into the MMIGW is to examine (1) systemic causes of violence including social, economic and historical factors, and (2) institutional policies and practices. The commissioners are to make recommendations on concrete effective actions as well as ways to honour the victims.

Canada is hopefully ready to recognize that some of the factors contributing to your death may apply to other young women across our otherwise great nation. The main recommendations I have raised over the years are: (1) more coordinated services for persons struggling with addictions, mental illness, and developmental delays, (2) focus on consumers to help stem the plague of sexual exploitation with more resources for those who are victimized, (3) credibility for families and improved responsiveness from police when loved ones are reported missing, and (4) public and respectful recognition of those who are missing and murdered. We will see where the next few years take us.

September 2: “Unidentified body found”

1997: (Tuesday) MISSING DAY #31 – FINALLY AN ANSWER

My darling Cara,

1997: I woke up to hear the radio reporting an unidentified body found the day before by a young farmer harvesting his crop. I jumped out of bed and grabbed the *Edmonton Journal* whose headline read “Police investigate decomposed body found in Sherwood Park-area field.” A picture showed four men in white bodysuits carrying a white body bag from a field.

I phoned the Sherwood Park RCMP with my concerns and was told someone would get back to me by the end of the day either way. I didn’t know what else to do so I went to work. Unknowingly, Michael Walters from *Our Voice* also called to see if I still wanted to do a story for their paper. That evening after work I saw four people gathering on the walk in front of my house. They came to the door and my worst fears were confirmed.

I always thought we were close enough if anything tragic happened to you, I would instinctively know right away. Yet all I had were premonitions. The years of not knowing where you were or what you were doing, and you not wanting to tell me, had taken their toll.



September 3: Mothers' anguish

1997: (Wednesday) "Body found in field was woman in her 20s" *The Edmonton Journal*

My darling Cara,

1997: Your name was not released to the media although a tidbit of information, that the body had been female, was made available. At some point I would have called work to notify someone that I wouldn't be in for the next while. The police were at our home most of the afternoon. Many phone calls were received from family and friends. I remember very little.

Your step-brother Buddy began with his usual, "Sorry, I've been meaning to call..." until I stopped him with "I have something to tell you – Cara died..." That was followed by the longest silence ever. I started asking random questions just to hear his voice again and finally his response was "Chip has to come." I left those arrangements in his hands.

2005: Eight years later, the *Edmonton Journal* captured the grief of another mom, Myrtle Gauld, whose 20-year-old daughter *Charlene Gauld* disappeared earlier in April. Charlene was missing over a week when her burned body was found in a wooded area south of the city. Charlene was similar to you in that "she wasn't afraid of anything" but different in that social workers and psychologists could pinpoint no condition or disability to explain her behaviour.

Like me, Charlene's parents felt they tried everything to prevent their daughter's descent into drug addiction. They wondered, "As a parent, what could we have done differently?" They were angry and frustrated that someone took their daughter's life and equally angry she had been unfairly labelled. Myrtle said not a day went by that she did not think of her daughter, but she would not let sadness consume her because she believed her daughter would want her to be strong. Like me... like me.

My hope is that the strength of your story can make a difference in the world.

September 4: Functional amnesia

1997: (Thursday) “Dead woman’s identity still a mystery” *The Edmonton Journal*

Dear little Cara,

1997: A very brief article under the above headline mentioned police were concentrating their investigation on the inner city.

Flowers began to arrive and soon my heart and the dining room table overflowed. To this day, flowers bring special feelings of warmth and comfort. At some point, I chose a funeral home and started making arrangement for a memorial service. Decisions, such as the celebrant, program, music, readings, venue, displays, flowers, refreshments, all had to be made quickly. Once again Will’s sister and some of her family were here to help. Lacking regular association with a minister or church, I approached the pastor from a downtown Mission where I knew staff had befriended you and let you sleep at times.

I asked about seeing you. The police told me they would not recommend it. I reread the article from Tuesday. The “body” was described as “not quite skeletal” and unidentifiable as male or female. I decided the police were probably right – it would be more upsetting than reassuring to see a “not quite” skeleton. I called the shelter and was told police has already picked up your belongings. I called a previously sympathetic reporter to offer him an interview.

Most memories are a blur. A bright young woman enthusiastically greeted me at the store with a cheerful, “Hi, how are you?” I looked at her blankly, wondering who she was and why she cared. She explained she was from Victims’ Services and had been at my house the other night. “Oh, fine thanks,” I answered. I managed to get dressed and leave the house so was in functional mode. What more could I say? Helpers must learn that post-trauma survivors may have temporary amnesia even if they appear to be walking around and completing tasks.

All I remembered about the Victims' Services volunteers is they insisted on leaving stuffed animals which I told them several times I did not want. While I understand that comfort objects can play a role with adults as well as children, a note to helpers is: they need to be offered nor forced. Mine were given away to young visitors who had no idea of their meaning.

September 5: "Cops believe woman murdered"

1997: (Friday) Patch needs a ride.

Dear Cara,

1997: Your boyfriend Patch called. He was in treatment for addiction and said he would not be going back to his apartment. He wondered about borrowing a dress shirt. He wondered how he would get to the funeral. He didn't even know what a funeral was. The RCMP told me to call if I needed anything. I asked if they could pick up Patch for the service and thankfully they agreed. I simply could not cope with having to look after him along with everything else.

An outreach worker from Crossroads called. He said you had completed a high-risk registry July 2 and the press had called him numerous times. The Memorial home called regarding more details about the service. They offered a limo; I declined. It felt too incongruent to ride in style after the callous disposal of your body.

Difficult decisions were made about expenses. I chose cremation and was asked about a casket. I could not imagine paying money to be burned so picked what felt like the glorified cardboard box option. Similarly for your ashes, I could not imagine paying over \$1000 for an urn so chose a smaller keepsake version, glued shut at my request, and received the remainder of your cremains in a standard plastic container. On the other hand, I did want a live organist and soloist and was happy to cover those costs. Grievors must be prepared for emotional responses.

The *Edmonton Journal* headline read, “Death turned out to be ‘dark future’ mom foresaw.” Staff writer Ed Struzik summarized the tragic contradictions of your last few years and my challenges in dealing with you. One story was that you asked for bubbles once while we were shopping and excitedly blew them in the mall before going home. That was your part of your childlike spirit and the innocence I remember.

The *Edmonton Sun* headline revealed: “Cops Believe Woman Murdered.” Staff writer Ian McDougall mentioned you had been reported missing but it was not known when the report was made. Most readers would not realize the irony behind such a simple statement. Anger overwhelms me when I hear of “no reports” in other media cases. The average public has no idea how difficult the process can be or how many other families might have tried in vain.

In your obituary, I wrote: “Even as a child, Cara marched to her own drummer. Born with a personality she did not choose, she was at times a delightful free spirit, frequently a challenge. Her limitations became more evident as she grew in age but not in maturity. She was unable to cope with adult society and slowly drifted away.”

September 6: “She will always be remembered”

1992: Six-year-old **Corinne “Punky” Gustavson** was abducted from her front yard in Edmonton, violently raped, smothered, and dumped in a trucking yard where she was found two days later. The crime would take over 23 years to resolve. Clifford Sleight was arrested in 2003 and found guilty of first-degree murder in May 2005. (See May 27.) “It never gets any easier,” said her mother, Karen Vallette, on the 25th anniversary of her daughter’s death.

2008: **Maisy Odjick**, age 16, and her friend **Shannon Alexander**, age 17, disappeared from the Kitigan Zibi-Maniwaki area north of Ottawa. They were last seen hanging out with friends at a park across from the high school.

Cara my love,

1997: Your memorial service included one of my favorite readings from *The Prophet* (1985, p.17) by Kahlil Gibran:

“Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life’s longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit,
not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.”

My brother kindly agreed to deliver the eulogy. Although I have spoken in public many times before and since, I could not trust myself to be composed that afternoon. Uncle Gent spoke of your love for your cousins and of being outdoors at the farm. He mentioned good times with your step-brothers, camping, playing on the trampoline, Fonzie the cat, equestrian events, and your love of animals. Several of your friends responded to an invitation to share their thoughts. One group remembered, “Cara was always fun; she made us laugh...”

Friends and family gathered for refreshments at our home after the service. Thankfully, someone took pictures so I have a record of who attended because my conscious memory is forever compromised. A recording of the service was also provided by the RCMP, who had video-taped participants as part of their investigation. Unfortunately, they also borrowed the guest book and it was months later before it was returned.

Several who attended were friends of yours not previously known to me. One friend mentioned, “We’re not happy that she is gone but we are glad that she is no longer suffering.” What a sad commentary when death provides more comfort than life.

September 7: Final respects

“Those we hold most dear never truly leave us...
They live on in the kindness they showed
and the love they brought into our lives.
What wonderful gifts of joy and kindness she brought to so many –
gifts that will remain with us always.”

From a Hallmark card received from your step-brothers

My darling Cara,

1997: The *Edmonton Journal* presented a respectful tribute with the headline: “Final Respects Paid to Life of Struggle, Pain.” Quotes from my brother’s eulogy included: “Drugs led her to a desperate and lonely life on the streets... She slipped through the cracks of services for her addictions... When she was happy, she radiated a childlike joy... Cara lived a life and died a death that no one deserves.” The article also recognized the suffering endured by street people, as expressed in the pastoral message: “We see lives so full of pain. The only escape they have is drugs and alcohol.”

Hidden in a tiny article on page 21, the *Edmonton Sun* (September 6) acknowledged my anger that drugs and the sex trade contributed to your death. “Every drug dealer and john in the city has to share some responsibility,” I was quoted as saying.

Even my dentist sent flowers. He is an exceptionally kind man. On the other hand, perhaps it was the first time his dental records were used as forensic evidence. How does one acknowledge the sobering impact of that reality?

Your step-brother Chip arrived from Montreal and came with Buddy for a visit. We had a surprisingly amusing time under the circumstances, laughing about some of your hilarious antics interspersed with anecdotes of the misery we all endured from Block. Buddy and his friends were good to you. One fellow used to aggravate you by threatening to cut up your cigarettes while you chased him, howling in protest, jumping over furniture, and running around

the apartment. On the other hand, the guys let you soak their hands for hours while you practiced manicures for your Beauty Culture class.

Memories about Block included his knack for undermining the enjoyment of others, and how his voice would get hard when he made pronouncements about the unworthiness of objects of his derision. An example, from when the boys were young, was once their mother came to pick them up for the weekend and Block refused to let them go because she was allegedly five minutes late. He pontificated for days that if he gave her an inch, she'd take a mile, and he had to prevent further violations on her part.

Poor little Chip, now six feet tall and attending university, was incredulous and exclaimed at one point, "Nobody ever talked to me." While Buddy and I had been able to spend many hours debriefing, Chip was alone with Block.

September 8: The evil of slavery

"Those we have truly loved never leave us... they live on forever somewhere deep within the heart!!!" From a Stardust Dreams card received from a former client

Darling Cara,

1976: Twelve-year-old Abby Drover was rescued six months (181 days to be exact) after she was kidnapped and confined in a basement room under a garage. That story caught my attention at the time and haunted my adult years with disbelief that a man could be so malicious and surprise that a young girl could be so resilient.

2004: Sometimes the evil of the world is overwhelming. An article in the *Edmonton Journal* reported the epidemic of slavery. Twenty-seven million persons were estimated to exist as slaves, more than any time in history in spite of legal sanctions. The conditions contributing to this exploitation were extreme poverty, government corruption, and a global economy:

“Slavery also includes the worst forms of child labour and sexual exploitation of women and girls...

The conditions of those enslaved are usually filled with physical and mental abuse and violence – or at least the constant threat of it – and sometimes unimaginable deprivation. Girls are frequently “broken in” to the profession of prostitution, for instance, through beatings and rape, and if they are rebellious, they may end up dead. Long hours, sometimes 15 or more a day, with no days off, privacy, or adequate food are common.”

The article also reinforced that the road to freedom is not easy. Survivors require assistance such as education, political participation, and rehabilitative care to escape the servitude mentality and embrace their own dignity and freedom.

September 9: Interment

“Shine through the rain and soar with the eagles.”

Dearest Cara,

2012: For fifteen years I kept your cremains safe and close in my night stand before I was ready to release you to a final resting place. I needed to find the right location and a mini-casket for your container. My decision was Holy Cross Cemetery, where I chose a plot with a view of the pond where geese often swim, near a bench to rest, and close to the road for easy access. After the rush and numbness of your first memorial service, it was soothing to plan more peacefully. You would have liked your service with the theme of rainbows and mountain tops. Rest high, my love, shine through the rain and soar with the eagles.

Your memorial began with Danielle Marie on CD singing “If I Die Young.” A simple eulogy by celebrant Verna Klimack reflected on your fun at the farm, your cousins, your step-brothers, and horseback riding: “Today is simply to remember the undaunted and fun-loving spirit who was taken far too soon.”

“Amazing Grace” was performed live by Danielle Boudreau. In 2006, after losing a family member, she founded the Memorial March for the Missing and Murdered Women of Edmonton, which was held every year since. We later worked together and she asked me to be one of her godmothers. She is a few months younger than you and a constant reminder of what your life might have been. She also sang “Go Rest High on That Mountain.” The closing song, “Up Where We Belong,” was sung by Buffy Sainte-Marie on CD.

2016: Today is also Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Awareness Day. My own experience leads me to believe that FASD can be carried through male genes. I did not drink during my pregnancy yet you demonstrated many associated symptoms. Other variables may be related to the relatively new field of epi-genetics, which studies how the effects of historical trauma can show up generations later.

A good news story featured Hope Terrace, the first residence in Edmonton to exclusively serve people with FASD. It offers support to 24 residents, a small step considering there are estimated to be more than 46,000 people across the province living with FASD.

September 10: World Suicide Prevention Day

2010: **Cynthia Frances Maas**, age 35, mother of one, was last seen alive in Prince George, B.C. She was found a month later on October 8. A 24-year-old man was identified as a serial killer, convicted in 2014 of first-degree murder for killing Cynthia, two other women, and a 15-year-old girl.

My dear little Cara,

1997: Your death felt like a suicide in many ways because you lived as if you wanted to die. More people in Alberta die by suicide each year than in car accidents, and family members are often cloaked with terrible guilt and shame as well as their grief. Children are born with a will to live and enthusiasm for life. What happens to change that?

Life continued to feel heavy after your service. The police had videoed everyone who attended and spent time with me identifying individuals. “What about the guy in the orange truck?” “He’s a cousin.” “Okay.” Grandma too had many pictures. It upset me considerably that the investigators kept the funeral guest book as long as they did; it was several months before I could try to decipher signatures and match names with people.

2011: The family of Cynthia Maas, who disappeared on this date in 2010 and was found October 8, came forward with a first anniversary statement that shared many of my concerns:

“Cindy had a right to live, to overcome her struggles, to become strong, and to be the mother she wanted to be...

Cindy was a social victim of disability, ethnicity, class, gender, as well as suffering the greatest indignity as a victim of murder... We would like Canada to strengthen the human rights of women, to provide policies and legislation which protect the vulnerable in our society. We are asking those in leadership to increase the funding for victims of violence, mental health and addictions... Murders do not just harm families but our society is harmed as we forget and are numbed by senseless violence perpetrated against women portrayed as deserving of death.”

September 11: Devastation and addiction

“Always leave people better than you found them. Hug the hurt. Kiss the broken. Befriend the lost. Love the lonely.” Old Soul Tribe, Facebook (Sept 11, 2016)

Dear Cara,

2001: 9/11 is branded in memories around the world. I was getting dressed for work that morning when I heard news on the radio of an attack on New York City. In shock, I quickly turned on the TV and watched, over and over, a plane crash into the Twin Towers as disbelief and horror filled my soul. Work was very sombre that day with a shadow of foreboding. The trauma of the day, as well as the heroes of the day, would become part of our shared experience for years to come and shape the history of the world.

2014: The devastation of terrorism is mirrored in smaller ways every day by family dealing with addiction. Aaron Paquette, Edmonton author and educator, shared his reflections about addictions on (September 10) Facebook:

“When you see unhealthy behavior in almost any person, be it a politician, an alcoholic, an addict of any kind, it’s easy to get frustrated, angry, to become dismissive, to judge.

But what we are really seeing is an emptiness and a fear, absolutely brought on by some childhood pain...

Addiction is a weird thing. It feels like you are controlling circumstances by engaging in an activity that will make your pain or emptiness ‘better.’ But of course, all you are doing in the long run is falling wildly out of control.

It’s an impulse, a driving need, a fleeing from uncertainty and a world of danger with no hope of forgiveness. It’s a numbing of fear and a deep-seated feeling that there is no reliable safety to be found...

No addict in denial ever wants LESS of their drug of choice. And justification, amelioration, lies, charm and even force are the tools that addiction will use to be able to feed unimpeded.

And it all leads back to the child whose world had undergone a massive destabilization. The result is a feeling of being cast off, alone, and with no sure, safe, loving thing to be trusted again.”

Some would say we also need to understand the pain, anger, and fear of world nations to build safety and peace.

September 12: Just Remembering

1997: Don't think of her as gone away – her journey's just begun;
This life holds so many facets – this earth is only one.
Just think of her as resting from the sorrows and the tears
In a place of warmth and comfort where there are no days and years.

Think how she must be wishing that we could know, today,
How nothing but our sadness can really pass away.
And think of her as living in the hearts of those she touched...
For nothing loved is ever lost – and she was loved so much.

From three Hallmark cards received

Dear Cara,

2014: Auntie Grace and I returned from a visit to Grandma. She was 89, living in a little home surrounded by her “treasures.” How anyone can find purpose and pleasure in collecting so much junk is something her family has not understood in all the years we shared. What solace can be found in rooms of photos and clippings depicting events of yesteryear? Is she afraid the past would not be real if not somehow recorded or photographed? Or are selected memories an attempt to distract from a past she would rather not remember?

Is she afraid of forgetting? My compulsive “note-taking” at presentations helps me retain information, a recognized technique of educational learning. Or is she afraid others will forget? My collection of articles related to missing and murdered women supports my social activism.

Grandma’s collections seem to be of trivia. She hoards miscellaneous possessions of little value for garage sales but signed away most of her legitimate inheritance from my father’s estate. She takes pride in “recycling” or recovering a few cents from useless items while seemingly oblivious to what could have been a comfortable nest egg.

September 13: Love always

1988: The decomposed body of **Georgette Elizabeth Flint**, age 20, mother of one son, was found in Elk Island Park east of Edmonton. No cause of death was determined. Unfortunately, that tends to be the case when bodies are discovered too late.

Dear Cara,

Georgette’s mother, Lynn, wrote the following words in memory of her daughter and her poem was used at the 2004 annual August 14 memorial for those lost to exploitation:

Love Always

Georgie, Georgie, my daughter so true,
Your mother never, ever stopped loving you.

Daughter, companion, and my special friend,
I tried to stand beside you until the bitter end.

Edmonton City Police wearing blue
Were the only true friends Georgie and I knew.

The Police care about adults and kids on the street,
As they drive or walk down city and skid row beats.

In my mind and in my heart,
I knew that we would have to part.

The streets won out you see.
Pimps, Johns, and Drugs took you away from me.

You passed away, leaving me alone,
To raise your son on my own.

I miss you more than anyone knows,
As each day passes, the emptiness grows.

My heart is broken, as you can see,
When God called you home away from me.

May you Rest in Peace, Mom's beautiful girl.
For your sake and in your name,
I will live on
And do all things the same.

Love Always, Your Mother

2003: Community members held a rally to close down the Cromdale Hotel, infamous for association with drug use and criminal activities. Ironically, I started my professional career post-BSW the fall of 1975 in a building on the same block, known to clients as the "Cromdale office." You, unfortunately, lived there at times before your death.

September 14: More justice delays

2005: The partially clad body of 19-year-old **Samantha Tayleen Berg** was found in a north-end trucking yard in January after the snow melted enough to expose her hands and feet. Although the death was originally ruled suspicious, months later the medical examiner decided it could be ruled a homicide. Those close to her said she was battling a drug addiction before her death.

Dear Cara,

2005: Today was a travel day for me and the Morningside turn-off, as usual, brought back memories of trips to Jo's Place riding camp. You, age ten the summer of 1985, desperately wanted to ride horses at the farm so but Grandpa didn't trust you and didn't have patience to teach you. You and two friends signed up for two weeks of camp, had a wonderful learning experience, and even rode in a few town parades around the area. That also signalled a turning point for Grandpa in that he was more comfortable letting you ride some of his horses.

Riding the bus allowed me opportunity to reread the poignant book by Wilma Derksen, *Have You Seen Candace?* (1991) What struck me was that Wilma knew intuitively her daughter died the first night she was missing, yet she still had to go through a charade to get police cooperation in looking for her. Candace was 13 when she disappeared on her way home from school in Winnipeg on November 30, 1984. That night her mother prayed for guidance.

“There was silence. The struggle wasn't over, but my struggle was. For the first time, I felt God was crying too. It seemed the whole universe was crying with me... Somehow the heavens were still open and her presence seemed to fill the room. She was close and yet so far – just out of reach... But she was safe, I told myself over and over again. It was over. Whatever had happened was over...” (p. 34-35)

Over seven weeks later, on January 17, 1985, Candace's body was found in an abandoned tool shed where she had been left to die.

2016: It was announced in the *Edmonton Examiner* that Edmonton had joined the United Nations Safe Cities and Safe Places program to help make public areas safer for women. The irony, of course, is that the City of Edmonton also licenses private facilities for commercial sexual exploitation. While directing consumers to protected sites may increase safety in public areas, it does little to shift attitudes away from commodification.

September 15: United Way Keynote

2004: **Kelly Anne Quinn**, age 25, disappeared from her Calgary home. Her estranged boyfriend later confessed and was convicted of second-degree murder.

Dear Cara,

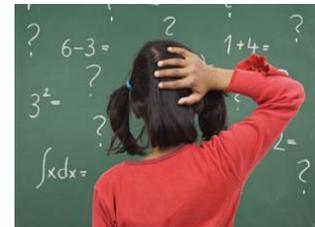
2004: I was asked to tell your story to about 1000 people for the United Way annual fundraising kick-off dinner. This was an honour for me because of the great work United Way does in helping Edmonton's most needy. Different pictures of you were shown on big screens around the room as I spoke. Some included you as a newborn, practicing a ballet pose, riding your bike, jumping on the trampoline, with your great-grandmother symbolizing inter-generational heritage and trauma, and with our good old dog Mufty, the same photo used on the bus ad. (See January 29.)

Many of the points I discussed were already covered in my "Home for Healing" talk. (See March 12-18.) The seven dimensions of vulnerability included learning disabilities, neurological disorders, social deficits, addictions, mental illness, homelessness, and incarceration. There is an ongoing challenge for social agencies to be responsive.

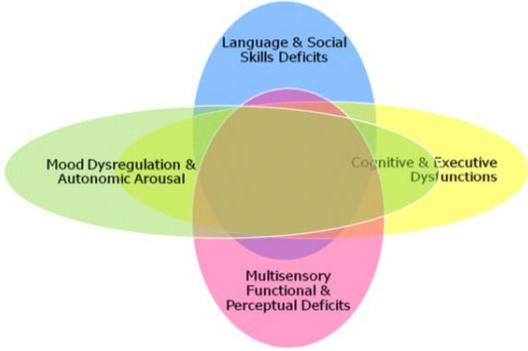
2017: My seven areas of concern were summarized again in my submission to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Inquiry. My hope was that the Inquiry would consider these among others with an expanded list of recommendations in each category:

(1) Learning Disabilities:

As Cara's deterioration continued, she was assessed as having "borderline" intelligence. This means a few I.Q. points lower and she could have been declared a dependent adult. Yet she had a bright, engaging personality and was often held responsible for decisions she did not have the mental capacity to make. I believe there needs to be more early intervention and a sliding scale for competency in helping young people.



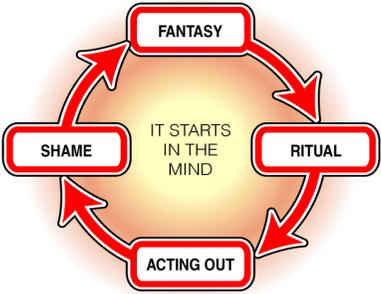
(2) Neurological Disorders:

	<p>FASD has given new interpretation to many symptoms such as lack of abstract thinking, impaired judgement, impulsiveness, and developmental delays. Yet my daughter shared those traits and I did not drink. This suggests FASD characteristics may be carried by the male parent; or epi-genetics may be involved, which is a whole new field of study.</p>
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(3) Social Deficits:

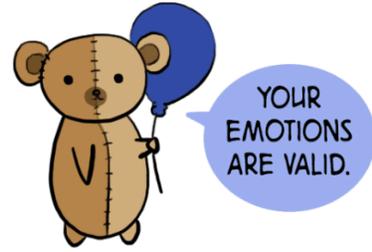
<p>Struggles with self-esteem and identity are part of many teens' lives without further complications. We can only imagine how difficult it must be for those who perceive, correctly enough, that they don't quite fit with the so-called normal world. Additional challenges may be faced by ethnic minorities and socially marginalized persons who experience exclusion and need a sense of healthy community.</p>	
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(4) Addictions:

<p>The Addiction Cycle</p>  <p><small>Source: Sexual Addiction Recovery Resources</small></p>	<p>Gabor Mate suggests “Where there is addiction, look for the pain.” Every day a certain number of people slip from recreational use of mind-altering substances to degrees of addiction. This causes multiple challenges for persons involved as well as for their families and loved ones. Work is needed around prevention, treatment, harm reduction and family support. If we have “safe injection” sites, maybe we could also develop “safe sleep” sites.</p>
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(5) Mental Illness:

Unfortunately there is still social stigma around mental health challenges. This is further complicated for people with aggressive disorders as they tend to be blamed for their behaviour. Resources are required both to protect society and to keep the afflicted safe. More preventative services are needed to help troubled teens engage with life in a healthy productive manner.



(6) Homelessness:



It seems cruel that society cannot provide such a basic need as shelter to those struggling with addiction and mental illness. Our social support system needs improvement. Integrated treatment is required for young people at risk.

(7) Incarceration:

I fully believe that society deserves to be protected from certain offenders. However, the long delays of court process seem to create a rotating door of meaningless appearances for people who may be struggling with any or all of the above noted vulnerabilities. Specialized courts with alternative measures have been or could be developed for drug involvement, mental health concerns, and sexual exploitation.



September 16: Miracle baby

"It's time to just be happy. Being sad, angry, and overthinking isn't worth it anymore. Just let things flow. Be positive."
Poems Porn

Dear Cara,

2014: My heart was heavy with worry for a miracle baby who recently appeared in our lives, born to young teens barely able to care for themselves. Their infatuation with each other lacked a mature foundation, their decision to become parents was premature to say the least, and

their capacity for independent living remained a question. That fact that each became the object of the other's affection suggested little else in their worlds had provided meaning.

Although their relationship was fraught with arguments, in between times they literally clung to each other, forsaking age-appropriate schooling or employment for the sake of "being together." Both sets of parents wisely declined to allow the young couple co-habitation in their respective homes. This prompted the teens to couch surf with neighbors and seek shelter in stairwells over the winter. Stairwells! Their decision to huddle together in a sleeping-bag, hiding in public places, rather comply with reasonable parental expectation, was mind-boggling.

Bringing a baby into such circumstances improved their eligibility for financial benefits, assuming they complied with Children's Services expectations that the child be safe. It apparently takes a village to raise a child. How does our societal village support parents who are themselves children? Some people seem to almost thrive on dependency, as if they count on being rescued when they do not help themselves.

September 17: Enabling and harm reduction

2002: **Deanna Marie Bellerose**, age 29, was first listed as missing in Edmonton. Word on the street was that she disappeared because she was to be a witness at a murder trial. Her remains were found ten years later.

Dear Cara,

2014: Still preoccupied with the miracle baby, questions arose about the extent of support family or society is obliged to contribute. The challenge for any care-giver or concerned citizen is to find the balance between not giving so much that initiative is dampened, but assisting enough that pro-active behaviour is encouraged. The young parents-to-be were upset that no one would "help" them secure an apartment while they did nothing.

A conundrum exists in caring for the socially handicapped. It is far too simplistic to blame parents or services for “enabling” when loved ones struggle. Many factors contribute to why some young people, or those not so young, are unable or unwilling to accept responsibility for themselves. Lack of a solid foundation may be part of the reason; lack of vision or resources may be a cause; individual personality may be a variable. Society weighs all of these dynamics in determining support for a range of visible and not-so-visible handicaps.

Another interesting perspective is “harm reduction.” For example, do food banks “enable” poor financial decisions? Yes, quite probably at times. But do food banks also mitigate the harm of those poor decisions? Undoubtedly. I can feel justified in refusing money for smoking, drugs, alcohol, gambling, or any other activity of which I do not approve. However, it is more difficult to refuse food, even if “non-approved” activities caused the budget deficit.

September 18: Honouring Terry Fox

2004: The body of *Jocelyn Margaret Wood*, age 22, mother of one son, was found in a wooded area near Bonnyville. She was reportedly a troubled young woman, essentially homeless, couch surfing with friends, and addicted to speed. With information obtained from the autopsy, the investigation was classified as a homicide.

Dear Cara,

1980: Terry Fox was honoured on this date as youngest Companion of the Order of Canada. He stopped running September 1, day #143 of his Marathon of Hope. His fundraising dream came true five months later when 24.17 million dollars was raised, a dollar for each person in Canada. Terry died June 28, 1981, one month before his 23rd birthday.

2017: Twenty-seven years later, Terry is still remembered and celebrated with runs in many communities in Canada and around the world on or about this date every year with money still raised for cancer research. It is relatively easy to engage citizens because they understand

the unfairness of cancer and most are eager to fight against it. Because of his personal passion and dedication, Terry's drive is able to continue and grow after he succumbed to his illness.

September 1, the day Terry's run ended, carries additional meaning for me as it was the day you were found in 1997 and the day the MMIWG Inquiry officially started in 2016. My hope is that, in some small way, the memory of your life and the thousands of other missing and murdered can imitate the momentum Terry was able to achieve. My voice was first raised over twenty years ago and many have joined me. Our vision is dignity, respect, and equality.

September 19: Grandparents and elders

"Be calm and be crazy, laugh, love and live it up because this is the oldest you've been and the youngest you'll ever be again."
American Hippie

"Sunsets are proof that no matter what happens, every day can end beautifully."
Kristen Butler @ Power of Positivity (March 12, 2016)

Dear Cara,

2014: The role of grandparent and elder can be a challenge. While each new birth brings delight, I would like to buy presents for the little ones rather than subsidize their rent. I want to enjoy visits rather than wait for emergency calls. I love Christmas concerts, the myriad of juvenile sports, dance recitals, birthday parties, and celebrations together. I like to be hosted by extended family rather than continue to provide. It is time for the torch to be passed.

I want to rejoice in new children without having to worry about their safety. Although I like being generous and helpful, and learned long ago to never loan more than I was prepared to lose, I still resent when repayment is considered optional. I prefer to pace my involvement and live my own life, hard-earned if not deserved. I did my best with what I knew. If it was not enough, may others learn from my mistakes and achieve their own success.

September 20: Museum of Human Rights

“At some point you just have to let go of what you thought should happen and live in what is happening.”
Unify (August 23, 2016)

Dear Cara,

2014: Yesterday was the official opening of the Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Today was the opening concert featuring Buffy Sainte Marie among others. Her “Universal Soldier” song has been asking for peace since 1964, long before you were born.

The Museum of Human Rights was the first national museum built in over 50 years and the first ever outside of Ottawa. This majestic structure was created at The Forks in Winnipeg, a traditional meeting place where the Red and Assiniboine Rivers come together.

The Museum was commissioned in the year 2000 as the vision of local entrepreneur and philanthropist Israel Asper, and championed by his daughter Gail Asper after his death in 2003. The goal of the Museum, featured in *Maclean's* magazine, March 28, 2011, was “to inspire visitors to take personal responsibility for the advancement of human rights here in Canada and around the world.” Gail said her father “wanted people to understand how this country came to be the tolerant country that it is now, and more importantly, to understand that if you are not vigilant with human rights, they can be lost.”

Finally completed six years after the original target, the theme of darkness and light reflects the juxtaposition of abuse and hope through history amid controversy about what was included and what was not. “Indigenous Perspectives” and “Examining the Holocaust” are two of the ten galleries. The most prominent is “Canada’s Journey” with exhibits on residential schools, missing and murdered aboriginal women, and forced relocation of the Inuit, as well as other topics such as the Japanese internment, Chinese head tax, women’s rights, disability rights, activism, language and religious rights.

Buffy Sainte Marie performed with a red dress hanging on stage. This paid tribute to the “REDress Project” created by Jaime Black in 2014 to commemorate the more than 1000 missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada. Jaime initially collected 600 red dresses to be installed in public places as a visual reminder of the women no longer with us.



(Images from Google)