Our man @ Twitter
Max Schmeiser BA(Hons)'03
Lionel Peyachew's bison sculptures appear to trot across the prairie in this photo by University photographer Trevor Hopkin. Peyachew is an associate professor of Fine Art at First Nations University of Canada. The photo is part of a series that appears in the U of R's Printing Services 2021 calendar.

Photo by Trevor Hopkin, University of Regina Photography Department.
Welcome to the fall/winter 2020 edition of Degrees. Well, this is a first. In the 15 years that I have been the editor of this magazine, I have never overseen the entire production of Degrees from my dining room table. I did manage to sneak out on a few occasions to lend a helping hand with photos but other than that, I have hardly sat feet on the U of R campus in the past few months. Working from home has been just one more in a long list of inconveniences that COVID-19 has wreaked upon us. Whether you’re working from home or are one of our essential employees still in the workplace, I trust you’ll enjoy getting to know the interesting individuals featured in this issue of Degrees.

Larissa Bezo earned her bachelor’s and master’s of arts degrees from the University some 20 years ago. Now the alumna heads up the Ottawa-based Canadian Bureau for International Education. The not-for-profit, non-governmental membership organization is dedicated exclusively to international education. It’s our country’s most important agency for attracting international students and work. And providing domestic students with study abroad opportunities—something COVID-19 has greatly impacted. You can read Bezo’s story beginning on page 8. Max Schmeiser has quite the resume. He’s been an economics professor at a U.S. university, worked for the Federal Reserve Board in Washington, D.C., held senior positions at Amazon, and is now head of data science for Twitter. Not bad for the very few kid who grew up in Regina knowing exactly what career path he wanted to follow. Our profile on Schmeiser begins on page 34.

Fifth-year business student Salmaan Moolla was the driving force behind a push to get financial literacy curriculum into Saskatchewan high school classrooms. Along with some fellow U of R students and alumni, he’s also developing some financial technology that just may help Canadians reach financial empowerment. Read Moolla’s story beginning on page 36.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of what has become the University’s Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science. It began in 1945 when returning WWII veterans were flocking to the University of Saskatchewan’s engineering program, almost doubling enrollment. To alleviate the overcrowding, the University of Saskatchewan Regina Campus began offering first-year engineering courses. The rest, as they say, is history. The story, “Celebrating a Diamond Jubilee,” begins on page 30.

Like me, Sean O’Shea is a graduate of the U of R’s School of Journalism and has been a respected consumer reporter with Global News in Regina for more than a decade. The changemaker story begins on page 36.

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As always, if you have any questions, feedback or just want me to say hello, my contact information can be found on the facing page.

Stay safe!
Greg Campbell BFA’95, B’95
Editor (working from home)
As University of Regina alumni, many of us look forward to returning to campus at some place in time: the Alumni Crowning Achievement Awards (ACAA) gala, the Alumni Association annual general meeting, and Fall Convocation. The pandemic has led us to change our plans for what we do during this period, and it is a credit to many University staff and volunteers that we continue to find creative ways to work around these and other challenges. The ACAA gala celebrates the talents and accomplishments of some of our most distinguished alumni, and the 30th anniversary of the event was slated to take place in early October. As we are now planning to celebrate the recipients virtually early in the new year, further information will be forthcoming shortly, but I would like to take a moment to introduce and congratulate the 2020 recipients.

This year’s recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award is Shanna Argue BASc ’92, professor emerita at Carleton University in Ottawa. Her current research interests are in the area of agricultural microbiology. Dr. Argue has had a significant impact on our community. As a student, student union representative, and executive director of the UR Pride Society, she was influential in the creation of the Women’s Resource Centre, Alberta) and as a research associate at the Aarhus University in Denmark. Former Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Microbial Ecology and Food Safety, Yost is the co-founder of the Institute for Public Health Microbiome Systems and Society. Her research interests focus on environmental microbiology, with a specific focus on agricultural microbiology.

Dr. Argue has been appointed the interim dean of the Faculty of Arts and a professor of philosophy. The appointment was effective September 1, 2020. A former director of women’s studies at the University of Waterloo, she earned her BA in philosophy and Russian language and literature from the University of Waterloo, her master’s degree in philosophy from Queen’s University, and her PhD in philosophy from Western University. She is a recipient of the University of Regina Women’s Directorate Leading Women, Leading Girls, Building Communities Award and the University of Waterloo’s Distinguished Teacher Award.

Brett Waytuck has been appointed to a second five-year term as university librarian July 1, 2020. Since being named university librarian in July 2016, Waytuck has taken a lead role in establishing the strategic and operational direction of the Dr. John Archer Library and Archives. Prior to joining the University of Regina, Waytuck worked in academic libraries in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario. Most recently, he was the provincial librarian, working with the public library system in the Macdonald Island Park and with the university libraries. Yost is the co-founder of the Institute for Public Health Microbiome Systems and Society. Her research interests focus on environmental microbiology, with a specific focus on agricultural microbiology.

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of Alberta. Her scholarly interests include experiences and outcomes of individuals with higher education, care ethics in leadership, and qualitative research methodologies, especially narrative inquiry.

Mel Hart of the Department of Biology has been appointed associate vice-president (Experience and Engagement) of the Faculty of Science for the year 2020. Hart joined the University in 2015 and established a reputation for innovative laboratory teaching and student mentorship. She was at the forefront of incorporating Indigenous knowledge into the science curriculum, working collaboratively with colleagues in making meaningful contributions to Indigenization.

Hanon Chaudhry MBA’09 has been appointed an acting associate vice-president (International) and chief international officer effective May 1, 2020. Chaudhry, a native of both John Jay College of Criminal Justice in the City University of New York and the University of Regina, Chaudhry’s association with the University spans 13 years.

The Faculty of Education’s Alec Couros has been elected to serve as the director of the Centre for Educational Research, Collaboration and Development – the Faculty of Education’s research unit. His research focuses on the areas of digital citizenship, social media in education, scholarship of teaching and learning, and media/ digital literacy. Couros is an internationally recognized expert in his field and has presented hundreds of keynote addresses and workshops around the world to academics, educators, parents and students.

Brad Farquhar began his term as the inaugural executive in residence in agribusiness at the Hill and Levene Schools of Business on September 1, 2020. He will serve in the role for the next two years and will provide a valuable resource for students and faculty.

Farquhar is one of Canada’s leaders in agribusiness and food policy. He is the co-founder, executive vice-president and chief financial officer of AgriPulse Capital Corp. The innovative TSX trading company is the world’s first agriculture streaming company, allowing farmers to borrow needed capital and service their loans by delivering physical crops rather than cash.

A four-year term has begun for the first female president of the University of Regina, Dr. Linda J. Johnson. Johnson replaced the first president of the University of Regina, Dr. Don Buchan, who served from 1971 to 1991.

The University of Regina’s Centre for Continuing Education (CICE) has announced the launch of the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge (CIKS), a new interdisciplinary initiative that will promote learning, cultural knowledge, and capacity building in Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

The Centre will focus on developing programs that are culturally appropriate and respectful, and that provide opportunities for Indigenous people to learn from each other and from non-Indigenous communities. It will also offer opportunities for non-Indigenous people to learn about Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing.
A few years ago, two graduate students—one from Malawi, the other from South Sudan—arrived in Ottawa for an orientation session en route to the University of Regina’s Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy. The young scholars were beneficiaries of the African Leaders of Tomorrow scholarship program administered by the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE). They needed support in finding a place to live and getting settled in Regina. University of Regina alumna Larissa Bezo, president and CEO of CBIE, reached out from Ottawa to her friends in Regina, asking them to meet the incoming Africans at the Regina airport and help out. Within days, an entire support network was mobilized to greet the new arrivals. “They soon had a home, fully set up through the generous contributions of Saskatchewan community warmth,” says Bezo. “This was a living example of Saskatchewan community warmth.”

The post-script: both young men thrived as master’s of public policy scholars and have since returned to Africa to take on leadership roles in their communities. “The friendships and people-to-people ties between Saskatchewan and Africa remain,” says Bezo. Such personal intervention may not be part of her job description, but it’s in keeping with the Ottawa-based non-profit’s role of facilitating both inbound and outbound student movements between Canada and overseas countries.

CBIE’s mandate is “promoting Canada’s global engagement through education,” says Bezo. The organization’s 150 members comprise colleges, universities, school boards, educational organizations, government agencies and businesses. This mission has many different dimensions. Since 1966, CBIE has engaged in capacity-building partnerships in the Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe, Asia and the Americas. Its areas of expertise include scholarship management, governance, education institutional design and management, and education sector capacity building. Since 2005, CBIE has organized over 85 training courses or study tours across Canada for international delegations of students, faculty, school administrators and foreign government officials.

Advocating for Canadian and international student mobility has become an especially urgent challenge for Bezo and CBIE in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic and closed international borders, which threaten to undo some of the organization’s valuable work in promoting Canada as a learning destination.

In the 2010s, Canada had rolled out the welcome mat for international students. Ottawa recognized that they were an increasingly important part of the economy, contributing $22 billion to Canada’s gross domestic product in 2018 through tuition, accommodation and other spending. “As a sector, it’s more significant in economic terms than even softwood lumber,” says Bezo.

Moreover, international students, far from curbing domestic student enrolment, actually increase it. According to a 2017 study by Kevin Shih in the Journal of Public Economics, the higher tuition paid by international students subsidizes additional spaces for domestic students.

From 2000 to 2019, international students in Canada increased by 185 per cent. The total number of international students at all levels of study was nearly 700,000—75 per cent of whom were post-secondary students. (Canada had already surpassed its target of attracting 450,000 international students by 2022.)

With China and India leading the way as source countries, Canada appeared set to attract a million international students over the next decade simply by maintaining its share of that growing market.

In fact, Canada figured to boost its market share, as competing nations such as the U.S. and the U.K. were becoming less attractive destinations. Enrolment of new international students in American universities was already in decline, owing to stricter conditions imposed by the Trump administration. And international student enrolment plateaued in Britain after its government imposed new rules limiting a student’s right to work after graduation.

In contrast, Canadian immigration policy was very accepting. Rule changes by both the Harper and Trudeau governments meant international students could work part-time while studying, automatically qualify for a work permit of up to three years upon graduating, and receive preferential status if they apply to become permanent residents. As a result, 40 per cent of all economic-class immigrants accepted by Canada were international students who graduated and wished to stay in this country. Some 60 per cent of all international students surveyed in Canada said they planned to seek permanent resident (PR) status. Then COVID-19 struck, upending international student enrolment and playing havoc with the planning of education administrators. According to Immigration, Refugees and
Citizenship Canada data, the number of study visas issued in the first six months of 2020 was down 25 percent from the same period in pre-COVID-19. This probably understates the overall impact. Only those students with study permits issued by March 18 were eligible to travel to Canada. “We’ve been advocating for a greater opening up beyond that mid-March timeline,” says Bezo. “That’s going to be one of the significant variables in international student mobility going forward.”

The decline in international students, especially new ones, has been a major blow to the universities’ revenues. “Our university has seen its international student population drop from one-third to one-quarter of overall enrolment,” says Robert Summerby-Murray, chair of CBIE’s Board of Directors and president of Saint Mary’s University in Halifax. “Still, the COVID-19 impact has not been as large as we thought it would be because of the ability to keep pressure on the federal government,” he says.

International student enrolment at the University of Regina has experienced a similar decline. Since the onset of the pandemic, UR International, the unit that coordinates international study, has been doing everything in its power to engage both enrolled and prospective international students during COVID-19.

“We are taking many measures to ensure that our international students feel a sense of belonging and connection to the University of Regina,” says Hanon Chaudhry, interim director of UR International.

Among those measures are continual and ongoing communication with students, individual and group advising sessions held over Zoom at different time zones, a virtual international peer advisor program, and virtual social engagement activities.

“We are continuously monitoring changes occurring due to COVID-19,” says Chaudhry. “We are constantly adapting our services to the ever-changing needs of international students both inside and outside of Canada. International students’ mental well-being, physical well-being and academic success has always been, and continues to be, the number one priority of UR International.”

The movement to online course delivery has meant that many international students continue to study for Canadian university degrees, albeit from their home countries. Federal immigration policy has been altered, under lobbying by CBIE, to enable those students to apply for a study permit and count towards the University of Regina,” says Haroon Chaudhry, interim international student mobility going forward.”

Michel Amar, who was communications director of the commission, was impressed by Bezo’s poise and tact. “To have someone of her ability to listen carefully, mediate issues and find common ground among all those very smart people with very big egos was absolutely remarkable.”

Bezo then returned to the provincial civil service as deputy clerk. At 29, she was the youngest person ever to hold that position. “My role was making sure the process of decision-making and implementation was working, that the priorities of the day were being addressed,” she says.

She eventually left the civil service to pursue her long-time interest in international development, doing consulting assignments for the Canadian government, the World Bank and the International Center for Policy Studies in Ukraine, and visiting the Kyiv think tank. Later, she returned to spend seven years in Ukraine, during which World Bank projects also took her to the South Caucasus region: Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia.

“I had always wanted to make a difference, not just at home in Canada, but being able to contribute to my own country’s rule globally,” she says. In the early 1990s, Bezo led a Canadian technical assistance project to professionalize Ukraine’s civil service—a challenge in a country trying to shake off the vestiges of the authoritarian Soviet regime.

“What that meant was trying to create more formal separation between administrative and political functions and to build up the leadership capacity at the senior bureaucratic level,” she says. Her consulting work brought her increasingly into the orbit of CBIE (which, over the past 24 years, has delivered 18 projects in Ukraine). When Bezo decided it was time to put down roots, she returned to Canada, going in-house at CBIE as director of international development programs.

Soon she was leading a five-year CBIE project to improve the accessibility of Ukraine’s emerging legal aid services. Bezo launched the project in 2014 by enlisting local lawyers to aid demonstrators arrested during the Maidan Revolution that ousted Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich. Michel Amar, who was then also working for CBIE, says, “Larissa was the right person at the right time to be working with those folks. It was an incredible legacy that she left that system.”

The legal aid service has since helped over 2 million people in Ukraine, says Bezo. She did four missions over 12 months to Vietnam, advising its Ministry of Home Affairs on how to professionalize the state’s civil service leadership. She drew on her experience in Ukraine, where many of the senior Vietnamese bureaucrats had done their graduate studies. She was promoted to CBIE vice-president in 2016 and interim president and CEO in 2018, then was confirmed in both posts in early 2019.

The CBIE board has identified four priorities: increasing the profile of the organization, cost containment and revenue generation, an expanded advocacy role—making connections in Ottawa—and bringing greater value to the membership, says Robert Summerby-Murray. “Larissa has really moved each of those forward quite dramatically in 18 months’ time.”

Bezo continues to travel widely for CBIE and has visited 27 countries on the organization’s behalf. “It’s made for a very rich experience,” she says.

She lives in Ottawa with her husband of 13 years (also from Saskatchewan), her nine-year-old daughter and her seven-year-old son. “My family and I enjoy the beautiful trails and green spaces. We also enjoy venturing into neighbouring communities in the Ottawa Valley to explore local sites, tastes and sounds.”

SASKATCHEWAN IS OFTEN in her thoughts. She misses her extended family, and the skies, vast open fields and expanses of land. “You just breathe a bit deeper and there’s a skip in your step,” she says. She also misses the province’s “friendly and generous people”, and the sense of community and volunteerism. She will tap into that ethos again to welcome eager students from faraway lands.

Sheldon Gordon is a freelance writer based in Toronto. Originally from Winnipeg, he has worked as a parliamentary reporter for the Toronto Star, an editorial writer for The Globe and Mail, and a producer with CBC TV. He holds a master’s in International Affairs from Carleton University.
How did you first get involved in music?

It was always around the house when I was growing up. My dad bought a PC when I was in kindergarten and by the first grade, I was using the Sound Recorder application on Windows 98 to speed up and slow down songs. I guess you could call those my first remixes!

How would you describe your musical philosophy?

Everything is centred around energy for me. It doesn’t matter how complex or simple a song is, or what it’s about, it has to transport you somewhere and give you some sort of euphoric feeling. I really want my audience to have a unique experience when they hear my music, and so I try my best to work towards that goal.

Why combine traditional Indian music and rap?

Fusing genres can lead to amazing new sounds and it attracts a wider demographic of people to the music. As for why I do it—
I see it as the most accurate way to reflect who I am through music. Growing up in an Indian household while listening to hip hop directly influenced my sound and music tastes.

To what extent has your social media savviness played in your success?

Social media has been an extremely significant tool that I’ve used since day one. Leveraging social media to its full extent can push your music to millions of people from the comfort of your bedroom for free. It can level the playing field between an amateur musician and a major label artist. Social media is key.

What was the best aspect of your experience at the U of R?

The people! The friendships and connections I made during my time at the University of Regina have sustained over time and I’m sure they’ll continue to last. Some of my closest friends today are people that I grew close with during my time at the U of R.

What are the things you miss most about Regina living in Toronto?

Again, it’s undoubtedly the people. Folks from Regina are just built different, and I’m proud to rep the city wherever I go. A close second, however, would be the pizza. Regina-style pizza—whether it’s Western or Trifon’s or Houston—is unbelievably good and an underrated highlight of the city. Any time I’ve had visitors from out-of-town ask for suggestions, I always tell them to grab some pizza and they’re always mind-blown at how good it is!

Where do you envision yourself in ten years?

In music for sure, but I know my business side won’t let me stay away from involving myself in other exciting ventures. I want to push the culture forward and make great art and experiences for people, and I’m confident I’ll find ways to do that through music, business and everything in between.

On July 10, Hitesh Sharma DIPBA’15 reached the top of the BBC Asian Music Top 40 Chart with Young Shahrukh, his hit song that has been viewed more than 5 million times on YouTube. Sharma, who performs under the moniker Tesher, has been releasing music since he was in high school. While attending the U of R, he made the dean’s list each semester of his program, received the prestigious Hill-Ivey Scholarship, and subsequently completed his undergraduate degree at the University of Western Ontario’s Ivey Business School. Drawing inspiration from the traditional Indian music he grew up on, Sharma has built a worldwide online following with his unique fusion of genres such as Bollywood, bhangra, and western pop and hip hop.
Max Schmeiser has always been in a hurry. From zipping across hockey rinks in his youth, to racing through his education at the University of Regina, he is always chasing his goals.

Growing up in Regina, he was a serious kid who knew exactly what he wanted to be—an economics professor. It was, after all, the perfect melding of his parents’ occupations: an agricultural economist (his dad) and a schoolteacher (his mom). He sped through his undergraduate career at the University of Regina in three years, not because he wasn’t enjoying what he was learning, but because he only knows one speed—fast.

Multiple degrees followed—a Master of Arts in Economics from McMaster University, and both a Master of Science and PhD in Policy Analysis and Management from Cornell University—and just like that, he realized his dream. Schmeiser became an assistant professor in the Department of Consumer Science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, teaching classes on topics such as family economics and risk management.

He was still in his 20s and had accomplished everything he set out to do. Young Max was right: being a professor was a wonderful job. But it turned out there were other careers beyond the dreams of even the most ambitious child interested in economics. Little did he know back then, as a kid running around the wide-open spaces of Saskatchewan, that he would one day live in a much hillier city, playing an instrumental role in the success of one of the world’s biggest social media platforms.

Long before Schmeiser became the head of data science for Twitter, he was a student at the University of Regina, taking every economics class he could pack into his schedule. “It was a small program, and I appreciate the connection I had with the professors,” he says. “I had the good fortune to get a research assistantship position with Dr. Marion Jones, and I got to be a teaching assistant as well while I was there, which really helped set me up for grad school.”

From the beginning, he knew his long-planned major was the perfect fit. Even behind a mask—the default accessory these days in Schmeiser’s current home base, Seattle—he is still passionate about it. “Everything just made sense to me as I took the economics courses, and I knew this was the right field for me,” he says.

Schmeiser became a professor just before the global financial crisis wiped out many of the jobs in academia. Still, budget cuts...
In Amazon Connections and chief economist and head of businesses, so the scale and the immediacy of the impact I could make changes and the next day be affecting hundreds of millions of customers or hundreds of thousands Amazon I could make changes and the next day be affecting Americans through policies I helped to inform, but at making a difference—and fast. “At the Federal Reserve, I could get picked up and inform policy, but there were several steps a professor,” he says. “You would get government contracts practical applications for people’s daily lives. thrived in an environment where everything he did had

According to recent statistics, Twitter, the company that U of R student Max Schmeiser works for, has about 5.3 billion account holders and 330 million monthly active users. In working one of the fastest-growing startups in the U.S., with the chance to inform product direction and strategy, Schmeiser had every box ticked on his job wish list. Then, Twitter called him in early 2020. Schmeiser thought about the potential impact he could have, particularly during the election year and in the COVID-19 era, and felt it was too good of an opportunity to pass up. With more than 500 million active users, Twitter is a worldwide watercooler for the exchange of ideas and information. As entrepreneur and author Charlie Li put it, “Twitter is not a technology. It’s a conversation. And it’s happening with or without you.” Schmeiser wanted it to happen with him. Of course, starting a new job during a pandemic is not without its challenges. He’s only virtually met the 60 members of the team he manages, and the transition to a new company was somewhat anticlimactic in comparison to pre-coronavirus days. “I just exchanged laptops and different people showed up on my screen,” he says, laughing. The work he gets to do, though, is exactly what he hoped. As head of data science, Schmeiser leads a team that performs analyses and runs experiments to better understand the impact of product launches on the public conversation happening on Twitter. They use a full set of tools under the data science umbrella to accomplish their goals, from developing metrics and success measurements to A/B testing and offline evaluation to prototyping and forecasting. While data remains at the heart of what Schmeiser does, many of his responsibilities involve managing more than numbers. As he’s progressed in his career, he now has people to manage too. “Maybe this comes from where I grew up, but I really care about my team members individually and their well-being,” he says. “I’m looking out for them, I care for them, I want to support them, and have their best interests at heart. People don’t necessarily always get that sense from their bosses and their boss’s bosses.” He also finds ways to bolster people beyond just those he works with directly. In January 2020, he began volunteering with Co.Labs as a mentor for early-stage tech startup founders in Saskatchewan. Given the challenges that the province’s economy has been facing the past several years, he felt his experience and insights could be of help in fostering a robust tech community and assisting companies as they scale their data science teams. Although Schmeiser isn’t sure whether he’ll one day move back to his hometown—that would depend on the needs and desires of his family, including wife Mara and their 3-year-old daughter and 1-year-old son—he does fondly remember the big sky, the never-ending horizon, and the summer sun that stretched long into the night. Scraping the windshield in 30°C big sky, the never-ending horizon, and the summer sun that stretched long into the night. Scraping the windshield in 30°C. “A degree in economics is a wonderful basis for a whole range of careers,” he says. “It offers a good framework for thinking about the world and business and policies. This is why you see economists everywhere, in government, academia, tech and consulting roles. It’s a wonderful education to help you be very effective in a number of circumstances.” Even though a future career at Twitter certainly wasn’t on Schmeiser’s mind as an undergrad—the social network was still a twinkle in the founders’ eyes back then—the beauty of studying economics is that it can be applied to a wide range of situations. “Once you have those basic tools and know how to think through business problems, it doesn’t matter what the business problem is,” he says. “The tools are the same; it’s just a matter of changing what you’re analyzing.” The frenzied pace that Schmeiser favored in his youth may have slowed a bit, but that laser focus on efficiency is still there. “When it comes to work, I have a sense of wanting to get things done quickly, while balancing speed with appropriate levels of rigor, and wanting to see accomplishment and progress relatively quickly,” he says. To do that, Schmeiser is decisive in his choices. That doesn’t mean he isn’t willing to reverse course if the data supports it, but he has a good sense for what he wants to do and how he wants to do it. For someone who had his life mapped out when he first stepped into the University of Regina campus, he’s amazed that once his vision was fulfilled, another one came along to supplement it. He is a textbook case of loving what you do and doing it well. When you excel, others can’t help but notice, and that will always open doors. “It’s surprising that a lot of what I’ve done is in no way directed,” he says. “Whatever I’m doing at the time, I do the best I possibly can at it. I’m never looking for the next thing; it just seems to happen and make sense.” Tech, as it turns out, is an ideal fit. It’s just as hurried as Schmeiser tends to be, with real-world results that fulfill his overarching career mission: to have a positive impact on the greatest number of people possible. Plus, he gets to get out all day long on those things he loves the most, including ensuring that every decision is informed by accurate data and rigorous empirical analysis, separating out correlation from causation, and using statistical and empirical techniques to solve business problems. He brings this same approach to his personal life. He jokes that he annoyed his wife by talking about opportunity cost, allocating resources to their most efficient use and time value, like when he points out the time she spends returning something costs her X dollars in time, and is ultimately not worth it. The only downside to working in tech is that it doesn’t leave much time for Schmeiser’s first love, teaching. But he plans to return to the classroom one day. There, he will continue sparking that same joy in others that he felt first when he realized he can use economics to answer so many questions that apply to the real world, such as figuring out what incentives people respond to or pinpointing when someone will get married. Maybe you can’t hurry love, but as Schmeiser knows well, you absolutely can hurry the statistical analysis that predicts it—and that carries an excitement, maybe even a romantic notion, all of its own.
In layperson’s terms, how would you describe your research?
In my lab, we build what I call disease-agnostic maps of the cell. That teaches us the fundamental biology of cells and also allows us to study many different diseases that change the human cell through mutations or due to an infection (for example with the coronavirus). Cell maps ultimately help us find new ways to treat diseases and develop new drugs.

What attracted you to science in the first place?
I remember very vividly watching Frankenstein. Seeing a scientist at work turned out to have a huge influence on me—the freedom to pursue research, explore your curiosity, dive deeply into a question that interests you and work hard on this question until it’s solved fascinated and enticed me to become a scientist myself!

How would you characterize the time you spent at the University of Regina?
I loved it! It’s the place where I started my research career. I will never forget the great mentors I had, who taught me how to do great science.

What do you miss most about Regina?
The people and their generosity—not that people in San Francisco aren’t nice and generous. One thing I don’t miss about Regina is the weather. But then there is hockey. And Canadian beer—my favourite is Molson Dry!

Are we on the cusp of an effective COVID-19 vaccine?
I am very hopeful that we will have a number of good options for treatments and vaccines by 2021, thanks to the joint efforts of so many great minds. The speed of discovery has been so incredibly fast. Just take the work of the QBI Coronavirus Research Group that I lead—we were able to complete studies that usually take us years in a matter of months.

During the course of your career (15 years), how far has science progressed as far as cellular and molecular pharmacology goes?
It’s mind-boggling how many advances have been made during this time, and how many opportunities this has opened up.

What is your motivation to support women in science?
My family instilled the value and importance of equality in me. I grew up in a big family of five, with three older sisters, and my parents always supported all of our education equally. My dad taught me that girls can do anything boys can, and I saw it every day in learning from my older sisters and my mom.

Are you confident that we will someday have such a complete understanding of our cellular makeup that we will have the ability to cure such diseases as cancer and Parkinson’s?
Yes. As a scientist, I am an optimist—it’s the possibility of positive change that drives me. Especially now that we see how fast science can and does move when we collaborate and explore new ways to approach our world’s problems, I believe anything is possible.

Nevan J. Krogan BSc’97, MSc’99 is a man on a mission. Not only is the molecular biologist a professor in the Department of Cellular and Molecular Pharmacology at the University of California, San Francisco, he’s also a senior investigator at the Gladstone Institutes, the director of the HARC Center and the director of the Quantitative Biosciences Institute (QBI). The research focus at QBI is to understand the mysteries of diseases like COVID-19 and HIV at the molecular, cellular and biomedical levels with a view to finding innovative treatments. Krogan also supports scientific scholarship in other ways. He has established two student awards: the Jack and June Krogan Women in Science Scholarship (named for his parents) and the Alec and Joelle Fabius Award, which generously supports Haitian students wishing to study at the U of R.

Rosalie Tsannie-Burseth MEd’01
Distinguished Professional Achievement Award
For her 30 years of leadership in education and her resolute advocacy for Indigenous language and culture.
Above: Keith Richards takes the stage for the first of two sold-out Rolling Stones concerts in Regina in October, 2006. I’m a huge Stones fan so when the shows were announced I immediately began inquiring about a press pass. Turns out the greatest rock and roll band on earth doesn’t need the Moose Jaw Times-Herald (where I was working at the time) for publicity. But I kept calling and after a few weeks, the promoter got back and said, “If I get you a press pass, will you stop calling me?” Deal. Before the show, everyone with a press pass had to gather in a special area behind the stage. Seeing our silhouettes approaching the stage, the crowd briefly thought we were the Stones and let out a massive roar. Keith himself has said that feeling is better than any drug he’s ever tried. Getting to experience that feeling myself, if only for a second, and this moment when Keith came so close I could smell him, has been the highlight of my career so far.

Above: Darian Durant waves to the crowd after the last ever CFL game at Mosaic Stadium (and what turned out to be Durant’s last game as a Saskatchewan Roughrider). Five generations of my family watched sporting events in that stadium. My first job was selling peanuts and popcorn there. During games, I remember watching the photographers, not the players, and thinking that’s what I want to do. And that’s what I ended up doing, mostly for The Canadian Press, who I’ve covered Rider games for since 2006. It was an emotional farewell for many in attendance that night. I like to think this photo sums up the attachment many of us had to the place.

Right: Richard Wolfe sits at his kitchen table in Fort Qu’Appelle, Sask. Wolfe and his late brother Daniel (in picture) founded the Indian Posse street gang. Daniel was murdered in a prison brawl in 2010. This was shot on assignment for The Globe and Mail in 2011 shortly after Richard completed a 15-year sentence for attempted murder. He told me all about it — how he chased a guy down a street and shot him over an unpaid debt. I also remember when I arrived at Richard’s house, a serviceman was installing a security system. Richard told me young gangsters could really make a name for themselves by killing him. Richard ended up going back to jail, where in his lifetime he spent a total of 646 days in solitary confinement. He died in the Prince Albert Penitentiary in 2016 at the age of 40.

Mark Taylor BA’00, BJ’04 has put his University of Regina degrees to good use over the past 20 years as a reporter, photojournalist and educator. Since July 2019, Taylor has served as the department head at the School of Journalism. He also serves as the school’s internship coordinator, social media editor, design director of The Crow magazine, and print lab instructor.
Above: Ralph Crawford works his way down an aisle in his bookshop in Perdue, Sask., population 334. I’ve always loved driving Saskatchewan’s back roads and finding places like this. Exploring Saskatchewan is even more enjoyable when a magazine is picking up the tab, which Macleans did for this week-long assignment in 2018 for a story about rural Canada.

Above: Second Lieutenant Leah Scott climbs into the cockpit of a Harvard aircraft before a flight at 15 Wing Moose Jaw. Shot for The Globe and Mail in December 2006, this was my first ever freelance assignment. I was so nervous about screwing up not just my big break but an important story. At the time, many women—including Second Lieutenant Andrew (Scott) Lister—were being rejected by the Canadian air force because of outdated admission standards dating back to the 1960s. Research that reassessed those standards gave Scott a second chance and she and five other women were accepted. My goal is always to recognize and capture significant moments. I like to think I did that here.

Left: My eldest son was diagnosed with autism in 2011. So when the provincial government announced in 2012 it was closing Valley View Centre, an aging institution near Moose Jaw for people with intellectual disabilities, I decided to document Scott Lister’s final days there. Lister, left, is non-verbal and was one of the first people to move into Valley View when it opened in 1955. More than 60 years later on the day he moved out, thanking his sister as he settles into his new room in downtown Moose Jaw. I like this photo because it shows that people like Scott, and people like my son, know more than many give them credit for.
Salmaan Moolla has already made an important difference in the community by spearheading the push to get financial literacy curriculum into Saskatchewan high school classrooms. Now, as the fifth-year business student and the company he runs with other U of R students and alumni prepare to expand their influence, there’s only one question that comes to mind. Just how bright is his future?

By Elsa Johnston

Salmaan Moolla is a changemaker who, over the past seven years, has worked steadily and passionately toward his goal of empowering people—high school students and adults alike—with the knowledge and tools they need to lead financially healthy lives.

Currently a fifth-year student in the University of Regina’s Hill and Levene Schools of Business, Sal—as he is commonly known—has already dedicated years as a high school student, university student and young entrepreneur to understanding and learning how to bring together his two biggest passions in life: financial literacy and socially conscious business.

“Personal finance is one of the most stressful things in a person’s life,” says Moolla. “I want to make financial literacy accessible for everyone, whether you live in Regina, Toronto or Vancouver, or in a small town like Yorkton or on a First Nation. I want to give people the ability to build a stronger financial outlook for their lives.”

Step by step with each initiative he has undertaken—from helping to develop curriculum for high school financial literacy classes across Saskatchewan to creating digital financial education tools and now innovating financial technology applications to improve Canadians’ ability to make sound financial decisions—Moolla has been laying a solid foundation for his concept of finding business solutions to meet community needs.

“There’s never been an easier time for a person to learn about financial literacy,” explains Moolla, whose student-led financial technology or fintech company, FiFo Technologies, is an emerging leader in Western Canada.

FiFo is developing personal financial management software that financial institutions can offer to their customers in order to help them understand their finances in a holistic manner—from budgeting, investing and goal setting to understanding what investment and saving strategies best suit their individual needs.

“We want to give the confidence and power back to the individual so that when they go to speak with a financial advisor, they will know what they want,” Moolla adds. “It’s a whole new way for people to interact and engage with their banks. A lack of financial education is affecting banks negatively with soared loans, but if you can educate the customers, you’ll see a stronger customer-bank relationship and the positive effects of a financially stable consumer bringing more money into a financial institution. It’s a win-win for everyone if you just put people first.”

In October, Moolla and his colleagues at FiFo, who are all students and alumni from the University of Regina, were accepted into one of Canada’s leading fintech accelerator programs, Cooperathon, run by Desjardins.

“Only the top 10 fintech startups in the country are accepted into the program,” explains Moolla. “One of the 12 challenges they are running this fall focuses on how companies can help Canadians become more financially literate. It was the perfect thing for our concept and idea.”

FiFo is the first Saskatchewan company to ever apply and make it into the accelerator program. Accelerator programs like the Cooperathon provide young startup companies with an immersive, hands-on experience in a short timeframe to develop their business concepts with the support of industry experts and specialized training. FiFo is also the only company competing from the Prairies.

“I am so happy for Sal and the FiFo team for all the success they’re having,” says Eric Dillon, CEO of Cooper and a long-time mentor to Moolla. “To have Sal be recognized by a financial cooperative like Desjardins as being one of the top 10 most promising fintechs—and the only one that’s been accepted into their program ever from Saskatchewan—obviously confirms that his idea has merit and he’s onto something.”

The importance of support from industry experts, academics, and private and public companies cannot be overstated. Their role in providing mentorship, time, money and expertise helps students with ambition and dreams achieve their goals and make a positive impact on their local, national and global communities.

“Students like Moolla, being able to develop strong connections with and gain support from business and community leaders, such as Dillon, can make a huge impact on their ability to realize their career and personal goals,” says Dillon. “I am so happy for Sal and the FiFo team for all the success they’re having.”

At the annual Achieving Business Excellence (ABEX) Awards in Saskatchewan, Cenovus and the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce regularly host members of the Saskatchewan Business Teachers’ Association and their high school students studying business. Moolla was one of the students from Campbell Collegiate chosen to attend in 2013, and he vividly recalls his first meeting with Eric Dillon.

“W ith his idea about making financial literacy a real challenge in Saskatchewan and across Canada,” says Dillon. “I told Sal, the best businesses are created when there are real life experiences that are solved with startup magic. You’re onto a real, lived problem. If you can find a way to solve that, it would be very powerful.”

As a high school student at the time, Moolla was already prominently involved in the Business Club at Campbell Collegiate, and was named as one of CBC’s Parents as Young Leaders for his youth leadership and community involvement. In his role as an executive member of the Campbell Business

The changemaker
For Jill Labas, who has been teaching business at Campbell Collegiate for four years now and is a close friend of Moolla’s, the mentorship role that high school graduates like Moolla can play for students is invaluable. “People like Sal are leading by example and they help our students set their own goals,” says Labas. She has watched Moolla’s ideas for addressing the problem of financial illiteracy develop and change over the years. “Sal’s a local guy creating his own fintech company, and it’s a huge asset to students when he shares his time and insight about being an entrepreneur and what you need to know about money to develop a business.”

Being a mentor to students is important to him. “Not in the sense of telling them what they should be doing, but to try to encourage an open mindset,” says Moolla, who is extremely grateful for all the mentorship and support he is receiving on his journey as a social business entrepreneur. “I’m always down for a coffee.”

As a student himself, Moolla has taken the financial literacy projects he has created in university and tested them out in competition after competition. He tirelessly pitches his and his teammates’ ideas to peers and industry experts to revise, build upon, and evolve their solutions and business concepts for advancing financial literacy and now financial technology. “Sal has certainly successfully applied business-related content from inside the classroom to build his financial literacy acumen and aid his startup journey,” says Lisa Watson, Enactus Regina faculty advisor and associate dean (Research and Graduate Programs) in the Hill and Levene Schools of Business. “In the Hill and Levene Schools, we really focus on helping our students to grow personally and in business, and develop their peer networks. The relationships that he has built with professors, business community members and fellow students through the University, and his involvement in experiential learning activities we offer outside of the classroom, have really taken him to the next level.”

Moolla’s involvement in the Enactus club at the University of Regina is one example. Over the years, his teams have won several regional and national competitions with their financial literacy projects. He has also participated in key business development incubators, such as Cultivator in Saskatchewan. These hands-on activities have been key to the successful transition of his business concepts for financial literacy.

“It’s easy to look at founders like Skip the Dishers,” says Dillon. “Yes, some founders get rich, but what people don’t see are the founders like Sal who have been at this for years and are deeply committed to making the world a better place through their businesses. They have to grind it out over long hours with lots of setbacks, pivots and speed bumps.”

The idea of experiencing setbacks doesn’t phase Moolla, rather, it motivates him to alter his course and continue on. “I want to be a part of growing financial literacy,” he says. “I know failures will come along—you even want failures to come along—but it’s how you adapt to those failures and grow from them that makes something a success.”

Ultimately, Moolla plans to use his financial successes to support social benefit. “Someday, I want to be able to utilize revenue generated from our company to fund an education-specific aspect of FiFo that would then provide this technology to schools throughout the province for free,” stresses Moolla. “High school students could then provide this technology to schools throughout the province for free.”

“I applaud Sal and his cofounders for their continued level of enthusiasm and commitment,” says Dillon. “They know financial literacy is a big problem, and they’re working their butts off to help solve it and make the world a better place—what’s more noble than that?”

Elsa Johnston is a communications strategist at the University of Regina, with a passion for storytelling. She enjoys delving into the complexities of science and learning something new every day.
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For the full story on this amazing alumnus, visit www.degreesmagazine.ca
A n uncanny quiet descended over the globe in mid-March of this year, as governments and public health agencies everywhere issued stay-at-home orders in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Activities on the usually bustling campus of the University of Regina came to an abrupt halt, disrupting the familiar rhythms of the school year. The sudden and unexpected end to in-person classes and the transition to online course delivery had the University of Regina’s Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science marking its 75th anniversary.

“Within a week everything changed,” is how Nicole Rodgers, a fourth-year Environmental Systems Engineering student and president of the Regina Engineering Students’ Society (RESS), sums it up. “The story of the lockdown and the ensuing transition to online learning will become another memorable milestone in the history of the engineering program in Regina at some future date. In the immediate aftermath of the lockdown, however, the focus for students and academic staff members was on adapting to teaching and learning in new ways. Rodgers and her fellow students shared many uncertainties: how courses and labs would be delivered, how assignments would be completed, and the status of the classes they were currently completing. “I was wondering what all of that would look like,” she says.

Eam Hussein, dean of the Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science, faced those same questions. He and fellow faculty members held a series of online meetings to discuss how to adjust best practices in teaching, assessing, examining and monitoring attendance using platforms like Zoom. The Faculty’s Academic Assembly, now conducted online, regularly discusses methods of course delivery and lab work. “We learned how better to prepare exams and quizzes, and how to design projects for our students,” Hussein notes.

After organizing a quick pivot to online course delivery, David deMontigny BASc’96, MASC’98, PhD’04, the associate dean (Academics), led an online town hall with students to explain how their courses would be delivered and to answer their questions.

One of the immediate decisions he had to make, Hussein explains, was either to cancel Project Day—an important event for fourth-year students, and their family and friends—or offer it in a modified form. Project Day is usually a one-day public event where students present their final-year design projects, known as capstone projects, in concurrent sessions. Hussein decided to cancel the face-to-face event and asked each of the five program chairs to devise a way to hold Project Day at a program level. This year, student presentations were hosted online and spread over several days, with practising engineers and practitioners helping evaluate the projects. “The program chairs handled it very well,” Hussein says. “We will likely handle Project Day that way until it is safe to return to face-to-face.”

One of the questions faced by people everywhere, of course, is what happens when you don’t have that face-to-face interaction with people outside your immediate circle? The Faculty is doing whatever it can to build community by encouraging meaningful interactions between students and staff, and among students, Hussein says. Rodgers admits she misses being around her classmates and having informal chats with her professors after class. As RESS president, she has led the efforts to move events online to promote the social aspect of university life. “It is important, especially for first-year students, to make those connections,” she says.

Despite the pandemic, the Regina Engineering Students’ Society continued to organize activities, including the September Engineering 1-4 event, where practising engineers provided students with information about their work experiences and advice on job hunting.

The pandemic is by far the greatest challenge the Faculty has faced in its history, but certainly not the only one. Growing up in the shadow of the larger program in Saskatoon, the U of R Engineering program has had to work hard to build its own identity. The U of R traces its origins to Regina College, which was established in 1911 as a residential high school. In 1934, Regina College affiliated with the U of S and was renamed University of Saskatchewan, Regina Campus. It was in this role as a junior college that it began offering first-year engineering courses in 1945-46 to help alleviate overcrowding at the University of Saskatchewan. The influx of returning veterans at the end of World War II had caused enrolment to double almost overnight. Under this arrangement, students in Regina still had to move to Saskatoon to complete their degree from the University of Saskatchewan.

The next major advance occurred in 1966, when Regina Campus began offering second-year courses under the aegis of the newly-created College of Engineering (re-named later as the Faculty of Engineering). Included with this move was a promise that third and fourth-year courses would be added at some indeterminate future date when an engineering building was built. At the time, classes were held on what is now the College Avenue Campus, which consisted of the original College Building and a few other buildings added later.

Harald Berwald began working in what was called the Science Building on the original campus in 1971. He was a tool and die maker, responsible for designing, building and creating devices or apparatus needed by professors, researchers, or lab instructors to explain concepts or develop projects. The shop was so under-equipped at first that Berwald brought his own tools from home. He retired 43 years later, having witnessed decades of changes in the Faculty and the University. “It was interesting work with interesting people,” Berwald says, “although sometimes what I had to work with—literally—was a sketch on a napkin.”
Elevating the status of the engineering school, even though only the first two years were offered in Regina, raised questions on the sensitive subject of having two engineering programs in one small province. The principal of Regina Campus, William Riddell, addressed the question by stating that the fields of specialization offered in Regina would complement—not duplicate—the programs offered in Saskatoon. In 1969, the first dean of the newly-created Faculty, John Mantle, and his colleague Cameron Blanchford, further differentiated the program by founding a co-op program, where engineering students would spend one semester doing practical work in the engineering field for every two semesters spent in the classroom. Regina was among the first schools in North America to implement such a program, and the first in Western Canada. It has been an unqualified success.

Art Opseth, who began his distinguished teaching career in 1974 and served as the co-op coordinator for engineering students, says he could tell which students had completed a work term. “They had a more realistic view of their studies and they tended to do better in the classroom,” he observes. Simi Falaye BASc’88, who received his degree in Software Systems Engineering in 2018 and participated in four work terms, credits the co-op program for improving his confidence in preparing for job interviews, practicing his technical skills and interacting with other professionals.

The program (now called the Co-operative Education and Internships program) has evolved to become a stand-alone program available to 1/2 of students in many faculties. The annual Mantle-Blanchford Award, created to honour the co-founders, provides a scholarship to the co-operative education student of the year.

Despite the moves made to establish a distinctive program, the program suffered a setback in the 1970s. Instead of advancing toward offering four years of courses, cutbacks in provincial funding cast doubts on the program’s very existence for a while. One consultant recommended it be shut down, but the Board of Governors rejected that idea. Another study recommended that Regina specialize in industrial and electronic systems engineering. Opseth, who currently sits on the University’s Board of Governors, strongly believed that the program should continue. “We had worked hard and systems engineering, and good, hardworking people in the Faculty,” he says. “With the systems approach, we had the broad, comprehensive aspects of engineering, while in Saskatoon they studied the depths of things. They did complement each other.”

Looking back, Hussein adds, the suggestion that the College adopt a systems concept was significant. “Adopting systems programming was very forward-looking. Events have shown that the systems approach is a very effective way of looking toward how the future of engineering is practised.”

Many graduates of the U of S, Regina Campus completed their degrees under the “two-plus-two” arrangement that continued until the 1980s. Carlyle Murray BASc’81 was what you might call a mature graduate, taking classes on a part-time basis while he worked as a civil engineering technologist for engineering firm R. J. Generex and Associates. “There were projects where a recent graduate engineer and a technologist with practical field experience were on a construction site together,” Murray observes. “That gave me the financial incentive—along with support from my wife and my employer—to pursue a degree in engineering to advance my career and increase my earning power.”

Murray graduated in 1983, with a degree in Regional Systems Engineering, Transportation Option. In total, he worked for Generex for 25 years. His next position was with the City of Regina. He is currently employed by Stantec Consulting.

Gary Bosgoed was another student who began his studies in Regina before transferring to Saskatoon, although he was happy to return to Regina to receive his degree in Industrial Systems Engineering in 1983. Bosgoed, who operates a consulting business and sits on the University’s Board of Governors, urges students not to race through to receive their degree, but to take multiple co-op work terms. “The work terms become foundational,” he states. “They are the best sweet spot of the learning curve. They are how you acquire a sense of how teams work.”

Bosgoed says being an Indigenous student in the 1970s wasn’t a topic, and that the University is doing a great job of Indigenousization on campus, with more supports and programming. However, perhaps reflecting his entrepreneurial background, he would like to push the U of R further to build more relationships with Indigenous businesses and encourage more Indigenous graduates to be entrepreneurs and wealth creators.

The Faculty has also encouraged women to consider careers in engineering, including by supporting the 30 by 30 initiative launched by the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Saskatchewan (APEGS). 30 by 30 aims to increase the representation of women within the engineering profession, specifically with a goal of raising the percentage of newly licensed engineers who are women to 30 per cent by 2030. Margaret Anne Hodges BASc’88, a graduate in Electronic Geoscientists of Saskatchewan with an aim to increase the percentage of newly licensed women engineers to 30 per cent by 2030.

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2021 ELECTION OF DISTRICT REPRESENTATIVES  CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

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Consider volunteering or nominating a fellow alumnus for the 2021 Senate Elections to be held in May 2021.

Send us a nomination form signed by three graduates and endorsed by the nominee. Nominees must live in the district for which they are nominated and must be willing to provide brief biographical information and a photograph.

The University Secretariat office will accept nominations until 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, April 15th, 2021.

For more information, and to access the nomination/biographical forms, visit our website at: www.uregina.ca/president/governance/senate/elections.html or email the University Secretariat at preeti.daniels@uregina.ca.

Nominations will be called to fill the following vacancies:

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Reflections on 40 years of journalism

Sean O’Shea BA’84, a graduate of the University of Regina School of Journalism, is an award-winning investigative and consumer reporter for Global News in Toronto. O’Shea has spent four decades working tirelessly to tell stories that matter to viewers; he’s exposed scam artists, shady contractors and organized crime figures. In recognition of his dedication and professionalism, this year he was awarded a prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award from the Radio Television Digital News Association.

By Sean O’Shea

Photos by Christopher Dew and courtesy of Sean O’Shea.

Sitting alone inside a satellite truck on a chilly December afternoon in Newtown, Connecticut, I noticed something unusual happening. Tears were falling down my cheeks.

A couple of days earlier, I had flown from Toronto to join a 12-person Global News crew in the small New England community where twenty children and six teachers at the Sandy Hook Elementary School had been gunned down by a troubled young man who killed his mother before turning a gun on himself.

As I was watching my cameraperson’s video of a community coming together to mourn the loss—strangers placing flowers and mementos on a makeshift memorial, locals paying respects at a funeral home—suddenly I felt overwhelmed by the enormity of what had happened.

I had not viewed crime scene photographs of the horrific tragedy. We didn’t knock on the doors of family members. No one in the international press tried to get those kinds of interviews. But we were immersed in the lives of the people in a tightly-knit village stricken by unspeakable grief. The experience left its mark on me, as it likely did on all the journalists covering the story.

A few days later, as we packed up our temporary office, a man with his daughter stood on the sidewalk holding a sign that read “Media GIFTS.” Media fatigue had set in and some people in the town just wanted to be left alone.

When I returned to Canada and went to buy a Christmas tree, it was not the usual uplifting experience. Covering the terrible deaths of those young children and their teachers had stolen the joy.

Unlike this particular assignment, covering the news for almost forty years has frequently been fun. I enjoyed reporting on two space shuttle liftoffs from Florida in the 80s and 90s, following the Challenger disaster. Election coverage has also been rewarding—from municipal, provincial and federal campaigns, to covering the U.S. race that ended in Washington with George H.W. Bush taking the White House, and the general election in Haiti following the murder of journalists and voters the previous year. Travelling to the Yukon when Jean Chrétien won his first term as prime minister was an adventure. And, reporting on the 1992 referendum, which could have triggered the breakup of Canada, was both exciting and terrifying.

My formal journalism career began after I arrived at the University of Regina in 1980. I had spent a year studying at a university in Ontario and then worked as a radio and television reporter in Lethbridge and Calgary, where I was born and raised.

I had caught wind of the U of R’s grand plan to create a unique prairie journalism degree program that merged academics with skills like writing, editing and on camera reporting. It wanted a corps of students to make a name for this new Saskatchewan idea. The program’s first director, Ron Robbins, approved my application and I was among a small group of students with great hopes and dreams.

At the time, journalism jobs were plentiful and, unlike many students today, I never had to work without pay to learn the trade. I was assigned to a four-month internship at the Edmonton Journal. I was paid $1,200 a month, which does not sound like much today, but it was enough to pay my rent and expenses while living downtown and getting experience in a big-market newsroom. I was rotated through general assignment as well as the crime and court beats. I also learned how to write obituaries. U of R’s paid internship program is still unique in Canada.

Months before graduating, I was already working as a weekend television anchor at the CBC in Regina. Later, I was hired as a reporter in the TV newsroom of CBC Saskatoon. After almost three years, I relocated to Toronto where I’ve worked with Global News ever since. It’s now been more than 33 years!

The journalism business has evolved dramatically over four decades. When I finished my degree, there were far fewer media properties and there was no such thing as online journalism. Today, many small market stations and papers no longer exist. And, it is much more difficult for journalism graduates to find full-time employment quickly, if at all. At the same time, young graduates today are better educated. Many hold two degrees and often they’ve also earned a college diploma. I’ve had the pleasure of mentoring about 150 graduates, many of whom have gone on to careers in journalism all over the world.

Technology has driven many of the changes in the industry. Just before I graduated, television stations were still shooting stories on film. News crews frequently consisted of a team of three, with sometimes as many as four at the national level. Now, a crew can be just one person and the camera might just be a smartphone. As newsrooms shrink, television reporters are not only filing stories for the evening news, they’re also producing radio and online reports—sometimes simultaneously. In spite of all the changes, some news
organizations are providing equipment and training to help. That’s also improved over four decades. More and more, news because of one of my stories.

It was the first time I was worried about my family’s safety so I temporarily had to relocate my wife and two daughters. I learned that the disbarred lawyer could pose a physical threat, and the story became the lead item on our evening news. I soon microphone and walked away. A few hours later, he was fired, to an interview. When I asked about his past, he ripped off his practice. His new employer was unaware because no one had done a reference check. I will never understand why he agreed for wrongfully taking money from clients in his previous practice.

I was about to interview a lawyer representing a medical network lost several million dollars worth of advertising, it still the company followed through with its threat. Even though the I had all the facts. I was confident, so the story proceeded with a negative story. My news director asked me if I were to interview a negative story. Instead, they use lawyers. I could wallpaper an office with the letters I’ve received threatening defamation lawsuits. One was from the late legal legend, Edward Greenspan, who was representing a cosmetic surgeon who had left a patient permanently disfigured. In spite of the threats, we aired the story. The doctor and his lawyer never called again. That’s not to say that I haven’t been sued. It’s happened twice.

I have been fortunate to work for a news organization prepared to defend journalism, frequently at great expense. Once, a company threatened to pull all of its advertising if I proceeded with a negative story. My news director asked me if I had all the facts. I was confident, so the story went to air and the company followed through with its threat. Even though the network lost several million dollars worth of advertising, it still supported me and our mission to inform the public.

Sometimes, as a reporter, you get an unexpected scoop. I was about to interview a lawyer representing a medical regulatory body when I discovered that he had been disbarred for wrongfully taking money from clients in his previous practice. His new employer was unaware because no one had done a reference check. I will never understand why he agreed to an interview. When I asked about his past, he ripped off his microphone and walked away. A few hours later, he was fired, and the story became the lead item on our evening news. I soon learned that the disbarred lawyer could pose a physical threat, so I temporarily had to relocate my wife and two daughters.

It was the first time I was worried about my family’s safety because of one of my stories. Concern for reporters’ safety and mental health is something that’s also improved over four decades. More and more, news organizations are providing equipment and training to help reduce risk. And, when journalists in the field face physical danger, they are allowed to make the final decision about whether to continue or back off. While in the war zones of Beirut and El Salvador, I felt I was on my own. Later in my career, while covering the Boston Marathon bombing and the fiery rail explosion at Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, where 47 people died, I got numerous phone calls from news executives asking how I was coping and if I needed help or counselling. This is an important improvement in how journalists are treated. It’s especially relevant as reporters, producers and camera crews cover the coronavirus pandemic, where physical and mental health concerns are heightened.

From my experience and observations, journalists usually get so caught up in telling stories, we may overlook or underestimate how we are affected in the process. That’s a fact I finally appreciate since reporting on the school shooting in Connecticut. Feeling sad as you rush to make a deadline doesn’t mean you’re weak. It means you still care.
We are proud to launch the U of R Hub, powered by Ten Thousand Coffees, matching students with alumni and community leaders for career-driven conversations.

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