

# Voices

Newsletter of the Psychiatric Survivor Archives of Toronto

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**Background:** Attendees of “Words on the Wall,” our recent fundraiser at the Gladstone Hotel, admire and place bids on bricks that have been imaginatively decorated by local artists. **Foreground:** Guests chat while eagerly awaiting the results of the auction. PSAT raised nearly \$2,400 at this event for a series of plaques designed to memorialize the unpaid patient labourers who built the walls surrounding the Queen Street asylum.

## “Beautiful and bewitching bricks...”

GEOFFREY REAUME

A brick enclosed by a tree. A brick covered by images of a tree. A brick with smooth glass sides all around. A brick imprisoned by bars with images of a woman inside. A brick with flowers sprouting out of it. A brick ringed by jewelry. A brick with Humpty Dumpty sitting precariously on top of it. A painted brick with a brain strapped to the top. A brick with an albino squirrel peering over it. A brick made into a teddy bear for “prescription hugs.” A bricked crushed into fine grain to make what one wishes out of it. A brick with “999” painted on it, reflecting the old Toronto Asylum address. Bricks, beautiful and bewitching bricks, forty-three in all created by dozens of artists to help put words on the old brick walls built by 19th century asylum patient labourers a few blocks away...

All of this took place at an event on April 21st at the Gladstone Hotel thanks to the superb organizing efforts of PSAT member Andrea White, along with the essential support of Chris Reed from “This Is Not

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Some of the many bricks that were decorated by psychiatric survivors and generously donated to this event for the purposes of the silent auction. We thank all of the artists who participated in this fundraiser for their kindness and creativity. All photographs courtesy and copyright of Graeme Bacque. **To view more bricks and other photographs of the “Words on the Wall” event, please see Graeme’s gallery at <http://graemesgallery.freeoda.com/words/>**

#### REAUME, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

A Reading Series,” which co-sponsored the event as part of the relaunch of *Remembrance of Patients Past: Patient Life at the Toronto Hospital for the Insane, 1870-1940*, re-issued by University of Toronto Press. The old brick-walled ballroom of the Gladstone Hotel dating to the same era as the patient-built brick walls at the former asylum, now the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), was a perfect spot to hold this fundraising event to raise money for plaques to commemorate the patients who built the 1860 south wall and 1888-89 east and west walls. Now, 150 years after the oldest part of the still existing south wall was created by unpaid inmate labourers, their work is at long last receiving permanent public recognition, through the efforts of PSAT, supported by CAMH, the psychiatric survivor/consumer community and allies.

The centrepiece of the evening was the display and silent auction of the artfully created and carefully arranged bricks in the Gladstone Hotel’s ballroom, preceded by a wall tour. Stunning art sculptures created by psychiatric survivors/clients from Workman Arts served as the backdrop on the ballroom stage, sculptures which were first shown at CAMH during Nuit Blanche in October 2009 as “inSANITY: The Story Behind the Wall” and re-staged for this event in memory of patients Angel Queen XIII (Felicity T.), Winston O. and Cynthia H.

A lively discussion ensued with a full house hosted by Ruth Stackhouse from Friendly Spike Theatre Band. Topics ranged from local mad

people’s history and the ethics of doing historical research into patient files, to compensation for asylum inmates’ exploited labour and the essential importance of preserving our collective past based on the perspectives of people who lived this history. Images of patients, including Audrey B. and Jim P., along with text from the plaques for which money was being raised, were projected onto the screen during the evening to ensure that the presence of patients past were prominently displayed, since it is their lives and contributions that everyone had gathered to support, first and foremost. The evening ended with nearly \$2,400 raised, nearly reaching the \$8,000 to \$9,000 target needed to secure funding for the wall plaques.

To everyone who contributed to the success of this event with your work, your art, your brick purchases, your presence, and your commitment to putting words on the wall in memory of patients past: we thank you. The plan is to unveil the nine plaques this fall, the final details which PSAT will announce far and wide, including to all who supported this project.

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**Geoffrey Reaume** is Associate Professor of Critical Disability Studies at York University. His doctoral thesis explored patient life at the Toronto Hospital for the Insane, Ontario’s oldest psychiatric hospital, and was republished as a book in 2009 (*Remembrance of Patients Past*, University of Toronto Press). **For an audio history tour of the patient-built wall please call: 416-535-8501, ext. 1530.**

## A Midsummer Update

MEL STARKMAN

I want to say how proud I am of PSAT and all of the people who have brought us to this moment in time. On the cusp of our tenth year of existence, we have come an awfully long way from our first meeting in the Parkdale Activities-Recreation Centre (PARC). From a mere germ of an idea, and with the aid of boundless hope, we have cultivated an activist plant of flowery growth with a tremendous future.

We are now on the lookout for a new space with an office, a reading room for researchers, and a storage space that is designed to meet the needs of strict archival procedure, equipped with all necessary safeguards. Once we've found a suitable space, we will be autonomous in carrying out our mission of collecting, describing, preserving and disseminating our rich history.

As outlined in the last issue of *Voices*, we have been involved in several ongoing projects and hope

to continue these and other endeavours. Our chairperson—the well-known psychiatric survivor historian professor at York University in the Critical Disabilities Program, and winner of the award for best teacher, Dr. Geoffrey Reaume—has accomplished much. By the time you read this, he will have given over seventy tours of the historic wall around the Queen Street asylum, or what is left of it, which was built with unpaid patient labour.

2010 marks the one hundred and fiftieth year of the building of the South wall. With the help of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) Archives, Geoff has worked assiduously in selecting text and pictures for a series of nine plaques that PSAT plans to affix to the patient-built walls in the fall. We've been raising funds for this project over the past few years, and are grateful to all those who have donated large and small amounts.

That's all for now. Keep tuned to this newsletter for more exciting updates.

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**Mel Starkman** is an archivist, activist, PSAT board member, and psychiatric survivor.

### Interested in donating to the historical wall plaque project?

A series of nine commemorative plaques are planned to be installed by fall 2010, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the south wall, in a collaborative project between CAMH and PSAT. These plaques will memorialize the psychiatric patients who built the wall and lived, worked and died behind it.

This project involves the creation and installation of nine Alumaticolor plaques of dimensions 18" by 16" to the Asylum Wall. Eight of the plaques will carry a large historical image (black and white) and a brief text relating this image to history near where each plaque is to be located along different parts of the wall. The text will invite the viewer to call a phone number (maintained by CAMH) where they can hear a recorded story to accompany the image about the wall's history. Plaque 9 will contain more text to introduce the history of the Wall and patient labour in general. The mixed media approach of images, recordings and text will create a thought-provoking visual and audio tour about the unique history of the wall and unpaid, exploited patient labour at Ontario's oldest mental health facility. These 9 plaques will make the history of the south wall, built in 1860, and the east and west walls, re-built in 1888-89, accessible for all.

#### IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SUPPORT THIS PROJECT, PLEASE DONATE TO:

**"HERITAGE TORONTO –  
PSAT WALL PLAQUES"**

Please mail in your gift to:

**Heritage Toronto  
Historic St. Lawrence Hall  
157 King Street East, 3rd Fl  
Toronto, ON M5C 1G**

Heritage Toronto, a registered charitable organization that works with the citizens of Toronto to advocate for, preserve and promote a greater appreciation for our city's heritage, has accepted our submission for the Patient Built Wall Plaques Project (CAMH). Psychiatric Survivor Archives, Toronto is now committed to raising funds for the project and a tax receipt will be administered by Heritage Toronto on our behalf for your contribution of \$10 or more.

**For more information about Heritage Toronto, please go to [www.heritagetoronto.org](http://www.heritagetoronto.org)**

You may contact Heritage Toronto's development office at 416-338-0682 if you have any questions about your donation and tax receipting.

**Heritage Toronto Charitable Number: 119266609RR0001**





The site of the Queen Street asylum as it appeared in 1971. Photo courtesy of the CAMH Archives.

## “Eve” and PG-2

### *Psychogeriatrics at 999 Queen Street*

DON WEITZ

**E**ve was in her late 60s then, one of thirty-odd senior citizens on the [psychogeriatric] ward—a ward where compassion and humanity were conspicuously absent. She knew Queen Street very well, because this was her twentieth or twenty-first admission in about as many years. Drinking and loneliness were two of her problems.

Comely, alert, and articulate, Eve stood out from the rest of the elderly inmates, who were heavily drugged, slovenly, neglected, and spaced-out in their own private hells. Incredibly enough, these lonely and lost souls were routinely locked out of their own rooms for eight to ten hours a day! That way, the staff could more easily control or “monitor” them. [Known as “PG-2,” the ward] cried out for a Randall Patrick McMurphy, the lead character in Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*.

Eve was very aware of staff abuses and neglect, and, fortunately, a fighter... She wanted to do something about staff neglect of her arthritis and kidney conditions, and about staff greed. Some ward staff, she claimed, stole hospital food from the inmates and took it home. Eve was determined to remove the damning label of ‘incompetent’ from her medical record. She felt it was like a curse hanging over her. At my suggestion, she started keeping a diary of her experiences on the ward... She finally contacted Carla McKague, a close friend and law student at the time... She accepted Eve’s case and agreed to represent her at a review board hearing, where Eve could appeal her doctor’s judgement...[of being] “financially incompetent.” Eve finally succeeded in challenging and removing this damning label from her medical record, refusing to leave Queen Street until she had.

In 1972, Queen Street had the highest inmate suicide rate of Ontario’s twelve provincial psychiatric institutions. No fewer than sixteen inmates killed themselves that year, while under “care and treatment”. Some OD’d, some hung themselves on the wards, some jumped in front of subway trains. I got off easy, I escaped.

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**Don Weitz** is an antipsychiatry activist. He once worked as a community psychologist at Queen Street Mental Health Centre in 1970-1972. ‘Queen Street’ (aka ‘999’) is the former name of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health/CAMH in Toronto. For a more detailed, personal account of life on a psychogeriatric ward, see “Good Old ‘999”, by Evelyn Parm, in Bonnie Burstow and Don Weitz, Eds. *Shrink Resistant: The Struggle Against Psychiatry in Canada* (1988).

This article consists of excerpts from “Manufacturing Madness: How Psychiatric Institutions Drive You Insane”, *Canadian Dimension* vol. 22, no.4, June 1988.

### ***“Still crazy after all these years...”***

We invite you to come out to Mad Pride Week’s Survivor Showcase at Toronto City Hall on July 15<sup>th</sup> (Members Lounge, beginning at 1 PM) and **visit PSAT’s information booth!** Enjoy live entertainment, special presentations, complimentary refreshments, and a wide range of networking opportunities! For more information or to RSVP, please contact Timothy at [timothy@awaycourier.ca](mailto:timothy@awaycourier.ca) or 416-424-2266 (ext. 242).