

Voices Matter



**Jane-Finch
Residents
Speak Out**

**EXCERPTS
EDITION**

**by Jane-Finch On The Move
Edited by Angelo Furlan**

VOICES MATTER

Jane-Finch Residents Speak Out

Excerpts Edition

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*** Complete chapter**

This “Excerpts Edition” of our book contains two complete chapters (as noted above), and excerpts from most of the other chapters. The full version of “Voices Matter” has eight different “My Story” chapters.

Introduction

It was a few years ago that I found myself walking along the east side of Jane Street, just north of the Driftwood Community Centre (4401 Jane Street). The mid morning sky was blue, the sun shined bright, and there was no one else in sight. The silence was a bit surprising, given that I was only minutes north of the Jane-Finch intersection and standing across the street from three large apartment buildings.

“Do you want an apple, sir?”

The young voice caught me by surprise. I whirled around, but as I said, there was no one else in sight. My reaction made the mystery voice chuckle, and that’s when my ears placed him. I didn’t realize I had walked by a tree; in fact, I had walked by a line of trees (what can I say? I’m not a particularly observant person). So I looked up.

There was a black child sitting up in the tree. With the passing of time, I don’t recall the exact details of the conversation beyond that initial greeting. I do remember that my mystery man was extremely well-mannered for his age and in good humour. The tree was full of apples, and I soon learned that it was not the only one. The child attended Brookview Middle School, and he and some classmates were sent out to harvest the crop, as it were. I turned down the offer, largely because I had a sudden vision of my new friend getting in trouble because he came in short one apple.

I certainly do remember that when we finished talking, I had a big smile on my face. Apple trees near Jane and Finch - who knew? I didn’t, and I’ve lived in the area since I was three years old.

Now, be honest. Was that the kind of story you expected to read in the opening chapter of a book about the Jane-Finch area?

Maybe you were expecting something like the following lead from a newspaper article written in 2008:

“Jane and Finch. What started as an urban planning dream quickly became a disaster and developed into a notorious neighbourhood where youth go to die or go prior to jail.”¹

Let’s not sugar coat anything. The Jane-Finch neighbourhood does have issues. Some of these issues are the kind that come with any area that has a high population density. And a lot of people live in Jane-Finch. For example, there are three apartment buildings on the north-east corner of the Jane-Finch intersection, including one with 33 floors. These buildings, located at 5, 10, and 25 San Romanoway, have 892 units among them, and house around 4,400 people.²

While those three buildings are likely the largest in the area, they’re certainly not the only ones. In fact, there are fourteen highrises along the four kilometre stretch of Jane Street from Steeles Avenue West to Sheppard Avenue West. These are just the buildings with a Jane Street address, as the San Romanoway buildings weren’t included. There are even more highrises if one goes down roads such as Driftwood Avenue, Grandravine Drive, and Tobermory Drive. In the area north of Finch between Black Creek and Highway 400, “62.1 percent of dwellings are in buildings with five or more floors.”³

Other issues come from the area’s demographics - compared to Toronto overall, there are more racialized groups, more immigrants, more single parents, more lower income families, more unemployment, more community housing, and so on.

Take these issues and stir them together, and one might expect to find an area that is lawless and violent, an area that steadily cranks out lurid headlines, a notorious area “where youth go to die.” Recent murder rates (2011) tell a slightly different tale. In the top ten most lethal neighbourhoods of Toronto, the closest we get to a Jane-

Finch location is Downsview-Roding-CFB, and it came in at number nine.⁴ None of the actual neighbourhoods that make up Jane-Finch were in the top ten.

This doesn't change the fact that Jane-Finch has issues. As I write this (summer 2013), the community is mourning the shooting death of a fifteen year old, the second such tragedy in six months. When fifteen year olds are being shot dead, all is definitely not well. However, it should be noted that there were only three murders in 2013. Perhaps there was a time where Jane-Finch stood out on its own when it came to senseless violence, but the sad reality is that Toronto now has many neighbourhoods with similar issues.⁵ Yet, it is "Jane-Finch" that still resonates as a synonym for all that is wrong with the so-called inner city.

The purpose of this book is to go beyond the statistics, the headlines, and the generalizations. There are over fifty thousand people living in this neighbourhood, but it seems the only time any of them get heard is when there's a tragedy, or there's a story that reveals signs of hope in Jane-Finch; in other words, stories that perpetuate the image of Jane-Finch as a suburban wasteland. This book is an opportunity for various residents to speak freely about our lives and about what is important to us. This is a chance to be seen as something more than a statistic or a stereotype.

Most of the people interviewed for this book are members of Jane-Finch On The Move (JFOTM). The group was formed as a result of a community forum organized by various area organizations and agencies in March 2007. The first meeting took place on May 31 that year, and the group's name was chosen on July 17, 2007. The group has been meeting on a regular basis ever since. Initially, JFOTM meetings had support staff and agency representatives in attendance. Over time, the group evolved to where it is now an all volunteer group, made up of current and former residents of the area. The main criterion for membership is a passion for the Jane-Finch community. Eight of the members have been with the group since the first meeting back in May 2007, so there is a great deal of continuity within JFOTM.⁶

In order to represent the thoughts of group members, the material was mostly gathered through meetings with members in groups ranging in size from two persons up to eight. Some of these sessions were free-ranging, while others deliberately centred on topics that were of particular interest to members. Most of the sessions were recorded on digital devices and then transcribed and edited by JFOTM's Chair, who happens to be the same person writing this introduction. In a few cases, members borrowed a recording device and spoke to friends and other members of the community. Those recordings were also transcribed and appear in this book. Some members submitted written pieces.

During the interview and initial transcribing process, members decided they wanted to maintain their anonymity. In some cases, the editor changed minor details to ensure members' privacy would be protected. Otherwise, everything in this book comes directly from the mouths of residents, free to express their personal points of view. There was no attempt made to have everyone share a common viewpoint on any subject. Residents of Jane-Finch are individuals, each with their own experiences, values, and opinions.

The material was sorted by topic and placed into the appropriate chapter. Some members and residents discussed personal aspects of their lives in detail, and in those cases, they got a chapter titled "My Story." The chapter headings and brief description of each are in the Table of Contents.

Feel free to skip from section to section, even from paragraphs on the page. The book has been set up as a series of comments and conversations so it's more readily accessible. If you live in the Jane-Finch community, perhaps you'll see something that speaks to your own experiences. If you live outside the area, perhaps you'll gain a better understanding for life in our community. We hope readers will find something that will inspire, illuminate, or perhaps even infuriate. A major purpose of this book is to start discussions and stimulate imaginations. It would be very satisfying to encourage fresh thinking about social issues. In every case, thank you for reading.

Angelo Furlan, Chair, Jane-Finch On The Move

Notes

¹ “Fear at the corner of guns 'n' drugs,” *Toronto Sun*, 23 March 23 2008.

² “Turning a rundown highrise into a community hub,” *Toronto Daily Star* 12 January 2011.

³ Julie-Anne Boudreau, Roger Keil, Douglas Young. 2009. *Changing Toronto: Governing Urban Neoliberalism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

⁴ CBC News, “10 neighbourhoods for most per capita crime in 2011,” the neighbourhoods are ranked by murders per 10,000 residents. The closest Downsview-Roding-CFB comes to the Jane-Finch intersection is Jane Street, south of Sheppard Avenue West, which is two kilometres away. The neighbourhoods which form the Jane-Finch area are Black Creek and Glenfield-Jane Heights. For more information on the boundaries, visit here:

http://www.toronto.ca/demographics/profiles_map_and_index.htm

⁵ J. David Hulchanski discusses the substantial increase of low income areas within the City of Toronto in his report, “The Three Cities Within Toronto.” At the time of writing, a digital copy could be found here:

<http://www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/pdfs/curp/tnrn/Three-Cities-Within-Toronto-2010-Final.pdf>

(<http://preview.tinyurl.com/od7kmhl>)

⁶ To learn more about Jane-Finch On The Move, visit us at: <http://www.jfotm.com>

The full version of this book is also available in Kindle format from the following online sources:

Amazon.ca <http://preview.tinyurl.com/oygnmay>

Amazon.com: <http://preview.tinyurl.com/qgqxa8b>

Amazon.uk: <http://preview.tinyurl.com/nvn8gm6>

First Impressions

People talk about their initial experiences with the Jane-Finch area.

I was living at Jane Street and Wilson Avenue, and I had my name on the waiting list for subsidized housing. I asked for anything along Jane because my mother lived at Jane and Falstaff Avenue and I wanted to be close to her. So approximately two years after I applied, I received a letter saying there was a property in the Jane-Finch area that I could view and if I liked it, I'd be able to accept the offer. That's pretty much how I came here. I remember when I told friends I was going to be moving here, they were saying, “Are you crazy? Do you have a death wish?”

It was interesting because at that time I was a single mother with two children and I was living in a one bedroom apartment. So if I was getting an opportunity to get a two bedroom at a cheaper rate, I would take my chances. I found within my first few months living here that the residents were more welcoming than what I was used to.

*

I moved into my house in 1967. It was a really good deal, I thought. Twenty-eight thousand, five hundred dollars with a thirty year mortgage at six and a half percent. The mortgage ran until 1993. The house was three years old. Streets like Hullmar Drive were not yet built. There was a farm house on the corner of Jane and Finch. The Jane-Finch Mall was being built at that time.

*

I came to Jane-Finch in 1980. I got married in Egypt. I came here not knowing anybody, having no family and no friends. It was very hard for me the first time I came to Canada because I couldn't speak the main language. It took me a very long time to get in touch with other people that are of the same descent or share the same cultural background as me.

I did go to school here to get familiar with English mainly. Eventually I learned English which made it much easier for me to communicate with people. It took me a while to get used to Canada, with the bad weather and the open kissing in public. I'm not used to that, being from Egypt.

*

There aren't too many members sharing my nationality in this neighbourhood; actually, there aren't too many of us across Canada in general. There's about seventy thousand of us in this country. Coming from a single parent household, I always felt sad that I never had big family gatherings, no one to celebrate the big holidays like Christmas, Thanksgiving, and the others where you feed the kids and everyone gets excited. Instead, it was always just my mother and I. So not having a big family was something that always made me feel bad.

*

I was born here. I got a diploma in Social Citizenship, and haven't found a job yet. My issue with Jane and Finch is that there is too much stereotyping. If you say you're from Jane and Finch, people look at you in a different way.

If you have Jane and Finch on your resume, you aren't going to get hired. I have to lie about where I live if I want to get a job. If you live in Jane and Finch, people go, "Oh." They already judge you and think you're a bad person. You come from that neighbourhood so you're not good.

Other than that, I'd say the community is pretty good. People here help one another.

*

Jane-Finch is a beautiful neighbourhood where a lot of tragedy takes place. Many bad things take place and anything can happen to you on any given day. You say it's a beautiful place but people from the outside come in and destroy the people on the inside.

Intolerance

How does it feel to be singled out because of your skin colour, religious beliefs, accent, or hair style? It can happen anywhere.

When I go to a mall with a friend, security will stereotype and start looking at us like we're going to steal. Personally, I don't steal so when the workers stare at me for so long, I'll start to feel, what the hell, is this because I'm black? Is that why they're looking at me? It makes no sense.

But that's just certain stores, it's not all the stores. I look like I'm in high school but I'm not in high school anymore. So they put me in that category, thinking I'm ready to steal. But I don't have time for that because I'm over eighteen. If I steal and get caught, it goes on my record which is not a really pleasant outcome for me. My goal is to do something in criminology.

How do I feel about this kind of discrimination? I feel hurt. It's because I'm black and if I was white, would I feel this way? Would I get this much attention? The attention that I want I don't get, the attention that I get I don't want. I get attention for the wrong reasons.

*

I have faced many discriminatory insults being thrown at me blatantly. Being of Muslim decent, I was always being discriminated against because of my traditional headwear, the hijab. Wearing it gives away that you're a Muslim. Even with the hardships, I still stayed true to my religion in wearing the hijab and not letting anyone see my skin and hair.

*

I've brought my children to my workplace, off and on. The last time, I brought my teenagers there and they were called "cute monkeys." This was just last year. I said to myself, "You know what? It's one thing that I have to enjoy this but there's no way I'm going to dress my kids to go there so that they'll have to question me after the fact, asking me, what did those people mean?"

This happened at another job too, where my supervisor asked me, "How are your little monkeys doing?"

*

I tell my kids, "I'm Jamaican-Canadian because I was born in Jamaica, but you're Canadian." People ask me where I'm from, and I'll say Canada, because it's where I live. Then they follow up, "Where were you born?"

So then I understand, and I'll say "Jamaica." And I wonder why are they asking me? Would they be asking this if I was white?

*

Going back to my school days, one thing I noticed was that white kids got bullied the most. I don't know if it was some kind of reverse racism, but they got the most abuse. They'd be called "honky," "hick," "trailer park trash," and they would get bullied, both boys and girls.

I've long maintained that the white people who live in this community are among the most disadvantaged. Because of the perceived social privilege that people think they have, people will think that because they're white, they have all these opportunities.

But often that's not the case. They're living in social housing, so they're low income, but they can't access equal employment opportunities because they're white. At the same time, they're the minorities in the schools

here. They're treated like crap, actually. If there was a white boy in the class, you'd call him "white boy," but if that white boy called someone "black boy" or "Indian boy" or "Muslim boy," you know that there would be some serious repercussions.

Thinking about it now, when you're in middle school, you don't really understand colonialism or those kinds of things, so I wonder if the kids were picking this up at home from their parents or older siblings? Who expects a twelve year old to make those kinds of comments?

*

Whenever a black person commits a crime, you always hear "send them back to where they came from." Nowadays, we send some money back home just in case we get kicked out. This is why Western Union is getting rich. With all this talk, now we know that we do not belong here.

Youth and Violence

Two of the biggest concerns in the community - why are they so often linked together?

*

You have these kids growing up without fathers, and that cycle just keeps happening. They're having issues psychologically. Sometimes you need a mother and a father to raise these kids. In a lot of these relationships, the father is absent - it does a lot of things to these kids. Then they let the streets start to raise them, to do the things that a mother can't do. Because there are a bunch of men on the streets. If you end up on the streets, you're going to find yourself ending up in some kind of trouble. You're going to get pulled over for something. Because of survival, you'll probably be holding something that doesn't belong to you.

And you have the young girls growing up without fathers, too. And I wonder if they see this as okay because you end up with a lot of young mothers having kids with young men who are not there, that don't know how to be responsible yet, they don't know how to be a father yet. So you're having young women having kids and that cycle continues. How do you stop it?

*

When I hear these stories of men from single family households who resort to crime, and people try to give reasons for that, it always makes me angry. If anything, you should be motivated to become a better person and get your mother and get yourself out of that situation. You don't resort to crime, or at least, I never resorted to crime. One of my best friends also comes from a single parent family. He happens to be black and he didn't resort to crime either. That's something that I think too many people use as an excuse.

It's funny: I'm very progressive but when it comes to crime, I don't want to say I'm conservative or right wing, but while I recognize there are systemic issues to crime, I don't like the excuse that someone came from a single parent household. It does an injustice to all youth who grew up in a one parent household.

The same goes for children who see a parent being abused. I saw my mother abused by my dad for a bit, and I'm not going to grow up and hit women. That's the thing I don't understand - if you saw your mother hit, you're going to grow up and hit your wife. I internalized it, I saw it, and thought why would I ever want to cause a woman that kind of pain? I just won't do that. There are a lot of excuses being made and I think people need to take ownership for their actions.

*

Here's one reason why you have a higher crime rate in our area: people take the law into their own hands because they don't feel protected by the lawmakers.

*

The mentality of young men in this neighbourhood is terrible. They need help and they need it fast because their mentality is staying the same as they're getting older. Their outlook on life is not good. It is destructive, which would make Jane and Finch more destructive than it already is for the next generation to come.

*

My son called 911 while I was sleeping. He told the person that the house was on fire. I woke up when I heard knocking on the door. There were four police officers standing outside. My son was only three. When I needed to discipline them, I used time outs for my children. I would take away things that they liked.

*

A future for the children in Jane-Finch? I hope there will be more opportunities than we have right now. I hope there will be useful programs for kids and youths, particularly more skill enhancing programs to keep them active and engaged in the community so they don't stray and end up doing things that are negative.

Education

“Teachers would call me lazy and an underachiever.”

All my years of education were in this community. It was a big letdown - horrible schooling, horrible teachers. I didn't realize this until I got into university and interacted with kids from other schools and other areas. A friend and I were taking a course with three hundred other students. We weren't happy with the marks we got on a paper. We spoke to the professor who didn't know either of us or that we were friends. He asked if we went to the same high school. How did he know? It was because we had made the same fundamental errors in the writing style.

I have friends who went to teacher's college and they didn't want to do placements in the Jane-Finch area. More resources are put into schools outside the area.

Kids are sent out of school so that they can get their lives back on track. When I was in high school, I got a letter putting me on academic suspension. My mother fought it. The vice-principal put me on a contract where I had to send in bi-weekly reports.

I was the only student whose mother fought for them. There were two who ended up having run-ins with the law. This isn't universal for the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). I wasn't motivated prior to this, but now I was getting high marks. I'm not sure why I wasn't motivated before.

My Grade Eleven physics teacher once told me I should just drop out and save the taxpayers money. Another time, the counsellor came to the class to hand out application processing forms for universities. I was seated at the front. When she got to the back, she ran out of copies. So she came back and took the copy away from me, saying I wasn't going to need it.

A few years ago, I was asked to talk at a TDSB young men's leadership conference. This invitation came through my organization (where I work), not my old high school. There were a few youths from Jane-Finch at

the conference. I didn't think they looked too impressed when I got up to speak. Once they heard I came from Jane-Finch, you could see them brighten up.

Teachers would call me lazy and an underachiever, yet no one ever looked into the issues I had with learning disabilities. Now doctors tell me it is a miracle that I progressed as far as I have with all these issues.

In Grade Twelve, I had to discuss terrorism for a presentation. I spoke about how America was doing things around the world. The teacher gave me a F, and said I was anti-Semitic. I was upset and went to the vice-principal. The department head read my presentation. He was Jewish and said there was nothing anti-Semitic about my presentation. He gave me an A. He ended up re-grading everything I did for that class and I got an A overall.

My feeling is that it was the older teachers who cared. I remember a teacher who helped me after class. One day, it was getting close to five, and I was still in the classroom with him. He called his wife to say he couldn't take their son to the eye doctor because he was still at school. That impressed me so much.

*

I've been sitting in the school office and I've seen how the students react to the teachers. It's like the teachers are losing control, and I question why that is. It's not the responsibility of the teachers but at the same time, they are responsible for the education of these kids. The teachers have the kids from nine to three, so between those hours it is their job and their responsibility to see that these kids are fully engaged. Clearly, they're not because they're finding all these things to do that are in a negative light. There's some kind of distraction, a lack of focus.

There are teachers at Brookview Middle School who treat these kids as if they are their own. They know the community, and they know they have to treat the kids as if they're at home. It gets rough sometimes, and you have to deal with these kids the way their parents would deal with them at home.

There was a teacher like that, and none of the kids would step on her toes at all. She knows all their names, and their parents. If a kid acts up, she'll threaten to tell their mother, who they know will deal with them. It's tough love, and that's part of the culture. You have to know the tactics needed to deal with these guys, and use these tactics in a way that they will respect you.

I've seen other teachers who get so frustrated that they lose control and start yelling. You're not going to have these guys listening to you if they know you've lost control. They're really going to take advantage of you when they see this. They're not dumb, they know what's going on.

*

Even when times aren't tough, resources are never equally shared. On some level, there's a cost analysis being done. Someone is looking at areas like Jane-Finch and thinking, "well, it's not like most of those kids have the capacity to go very far." So resources get shifted over to the best and the brightest, just like always. How well has that worked out for society as a whole? How much potential has our society lost by writing off so many as not being bright enough, or being unable to learn?

A few years ago, I read some articles on advances in brain science and how they should be applied to teaching. I don't have the knowledge to lay it all out here, but the key is that brains are basically the same.²

When it comes to learning capacity, there's no difference between a male brain and a female brain, no difference between a black brain and a yellow brain. Deep down, we all want to learn.

Think a child is dumb and destined to be an underachiever? Tell me, does that child play video games? Watch how a child bears down and learns how to master a video game, and then try to tell me that child can't learn.

It's a matter of finding the right motivation, setting the right environment, and finding relevance in what's being taught.

I said at the start that resources aren't equally shared. What I should have said is that resources aren't equally developed. And by "resources," I mean the minds of our youth. Let's look at the bigger picture. Rather than ask for more money to be put into the same old system that has been underdeveloping so many students, shouldn't be we asking for a system that brings out the learning capacities of every child?

Notes

¹ Westview Centennial Secondary School (755 Oakdale Road) offers Grades Nine to Twelve. The school motto is NOS OMNIA TENTEMUS ~ "Let Us Attempt All Things."

² An article that discusses how advances in neuroscience can be applied to education is located here: <http://atkinsonfoundation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/brainstorm-the-secret-to-better-schools.pdf> or <http://preview.tinyurl.com/o5lz7fc>

From the article: "The brain is malleable. And the research is showing that if students think they can learn, then they do. If they think their intelligence is fixed at a low level - whether because of social or economic status, skin colour, gender, family history, which country they live in - then they stick to that level."

Housing

Various insights into life as lived in public housing.

Background: when we talk about "housing" in this chapter, we mean social housing managed by Toronto Community Housing, or TCH for short. TCH has a large presence in Jane-Finch: there are nine TCH sites in an area starting north at Shoreham Drive, going slightly west of Jane Street, south to Grandravine Drive, and east to Tobermory Drive.

The Toronto Community Housing Corporation was incorporated by the City of Toronto in 2000 to manage social housing.

The actual housing has been around much longer. In 1964, the Ontario Housing Corporation (OHC) was created to build affordable housing. A 1958 plan called for 1,500 units to be built in the area later to be known as Jane-Finch. Once the shovels hit the ground, the area experienced a massive population surge in a single decade, going from 1,300 people in 1961 to over 33,000 by 1971.¹ By 1975, just over twenty-two percent of all Jane-Finch dwellings were public housing.²

The Jane-Finch project was designed as a reproduction of downtown Toronto's Alexandra Park, and "the internal principles governing both designs were similar - clean, uncluttered, and enclosed space set off from the general community."³

How well did the model work? Let's listen to those who live there.

*

Community housing to me is like an industrial complex. If you look at them from overhead, you're so locked in, so crammed. All this concrete, all these high walls, it's almost like a prison. Police will come into these areas and harass folks, search them, and ask them questions. So you may be living there, but you're never really comfortable or secure. You have to deal with the violence within the walls and you have to deal with the poverty within those walls, and there's nowhere to run within those walls.

*

I went to a meeting a few years ago where residents could discuss housing issues. There was a woman who complained about rent geared to income. She was living in a \$800 a month apartment. She started to get overtime at work, and eventually her rent went up to \$1200 a month. As she said, "If you came into my place, you'd see it is not a \$1200 a month apartment."

How is subsidized housing designed? Is it designed to help a person move up, or is it designed to keep a person down?

*

I got a new stove today. Why do I have to get electrocuted four times before getting a new stove?

I got shocked by my stove, and tried to figure out what happened. Then I got shocked again. So I called TCH and told them, "I was shocked by my stove once already. I just got shocked right now and I'm burning, so you guys need to check the stove."

The gentleman came and he said the stove looked fine - maybe my hands were wet when I touched the pot. I said that something couldn't be fine if I can't have wet hands when I touch a pot or I could get shocked. So many people would have been electrocuted by now if that was the case.

So that was his story and I decided, fine, whatever. I got shocked again. The fourth time, I was burning. It felt like I had my hands under hot water. My fingertips, my nose, and my lips were burning. My extremities and my ears had the same feeling like when your foot falls asleep. You just want to rub it and make it stop.

The effects of the fourth shock lasted a few days. So I called TCH and told them I was going to call my councillor. They said they'd send me a new stove in a few days. And they did.

Everything else I've ever received, some touch ups, the new water heater, everything happened because I said I was going home to call my councillor and right away, it got done within a week. I've never called my councillor. That's how you get the service. It's really ridiculous.

*

Community housing is not as communal as one might think. In community housing, there's a lot of back-biting going on.

When I first moved into community housing, I didn't really engage with others very much. That was because I had heard so much about living in TCH - how people behaved, the violence, all those images that were pressed into my mind by what people said.

So for the first few years, I would mainly stay inside, go out of the area to the bus stop and go back. Then a couple of years later, I started engaging with one or two neighbours and getting out there, exploring what was going on in the community.

I don't know if that was such a great idea. Of course you got to know people, but at the same time, now you find yourself in a lot of community arguments and community mix ups.

This person feels they have more seniority in the area than that person has. There's a lot of bickering. If there's an event, there's all this animosity - people can't seem to get along because this person feels like they should be in charge, and that person should be in charge. It just gets so technical with the people there. It was a turn-off after a while.

Notes

¹ John Sakamoto, "How Jane-Finch was born," *Toronto Star*, November 30, 1986.

² Julie-Anne Boudreau, Roger Keil, Douglas Young. 2009. *Changing Toronto: Governing Urban Neoliberalism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

³ "Metro's Suburbs In Transition: Background Report April 1979," Social Planning Council for Metropolitan Toronto.

Police

"We would love to work with you guys, but we can't trust you."

Living in Jane and Finch, the police visit more often; therefore, if the youths are getting into mischief there is more chance they will be seen. The youths get stopped more often and will get arrested for minor things that they could be warned about or do some community service if they lived somewhere else.

It is hard to send my son even to empty the garbage because of the fear of the police bothering him. If I send him to empty the garbage, especially at night, I will watch him while he empties the garbage.

I think I fear the police more than I fear God. God is fair; the police, on the other hand, will do to you what they please and the system tends to favour the police more than us even when they are lying.

It is not just going to court that is the problem but the whole process: being arrested, having to find a guarantor, and going to court all the time. The worst part is the fact that you will be in the system so that each time you want to travel to the United States you have to explain that charge. The police have the power to make your life miserable.

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TAVIS¹ was supposed to be there to build relationships between the police and the community, but it sure doesn't seem that way. When they first got access to go into the community, it became harassment sessions.

And then after meetings with the community, things simmered down a little bit. They started coming in respectfully and greeting people in a well-mannered way.

I guess as time goes on, there are no more meetings with the community the way it used to be. They fall back into the same cold-hearted habits. No one's really saying much, and no one's really watching them.

*

There were some police walking around, say a month ago (summer of 2013). I guess they were supposed to be doing community engagement. There's this disabled boy that lives not far from me. There's something wrong with his foot and he's been sick these days. He was smoking weed in front of his door, and the police saw him.

Rather than engage with him, they started using their force, saying, “You HAVE to talk to us, you HAVE to let us search you, and you HAVE to do this.”

So people called me to come see what was going on. I asked, “Is there a problem here, officer?”

And they responded, “Stay back, stay back, we’ll tell you what’s going on after we’re done!”

“Excuse me? I’m the tenant rep around here. This is my community and I need to know if you guys are trespassing. What’s the problem?”

Afterwards, I found out that he’s getting arrested for resisting arrest. And they didn’t say it then, but he was also being arrested for smoking a spliff (marijuana). I told them I was taking this to the next TAVIS meeting because people couldn’t trust the police because they abuse their authority, and they use aggressiveness to try and control the people.

After a while, they were dragging him because he didn’t want to go with them. The police said he was fighting them and trying to run away, but he needs a cane - how can someone who can hardly walk be trying to run? There were five officers and they threw him down on the ground. They took him off to their car.

I went inside and when I came back out, there were now about fifteen officers out there for one disabled guy. I don’t know where they came from. There were four officers trying to get him into the car, dragging him and all of that.

I took a picture of them. I had a discussion with the officers.

I said, “People smoke for medication - it’s better to have him sitting outside his door than to be off doing foolishness. There are more serious crimes out there to be fighting and look how many of you are here when there could be something serious happening elsewhere.”

His mother came, and she showed them that he had one of those cards that allowed him to smoke for medical purposes. I don’t know if they actually took him down to 31 Division but they had to let him go. The officers made it seem like such a big deal. That’s why the community doesn’t trust them.

One officer even wanted to take me on. He said that my mouth was too big, and another officer had to tell him to be quiet. I think I touched a nerve when I asked him, “Did you get bullied when you were younger?”

I told everyone to take out their cameras to try and calm it down. I said, “Take pictures! Take pictures!”

All the people were going click, click! That calmed down the police.

Being a minority you get a lot of different issues and a lot of different challenges that you have to face. You don’t feel comfortable on a certain level. I mean, there are days that are beautiful - nobody’s bothering you.

Why do we have all those officers patrolling the area? I know some people say it makes them feel safe, but do we need twenty police officers showing up for a misdemeanour?

*

Every time the police come around, it’s always to try and intimidate somebody. Why can’t they come around and try to get to know the community - build up a relationship? Come in to say hello and do your job to protect and make sure everything’s okay.

Instead every time they come into the community, it’s to act tough in their approach: “What are YOU doing here?” And you have to know that with the way you approach people, they’re going to put up a resistance. Then the police forget their job and take it to a personal level.

It's like we don't want you here because you're not here to make sure we're okay and we're safe, you're coming here to harass people. Of course you'll get resistance from the people.

Better policing is something we need when looking towards the future. We need well trained officers - better trained. There's a dialogue that they should engage in - get to know who people are and they'll talk to you. Let them know you're just doing your job, then they'll accept you. There are a lot of issues that we have to face in Jane-Finch. I told the officers, "We would love to work with you guys, but we can't trust you."

*

Police are watching these youth, ages ten to fourteen, because they don't want them to form gangs. This tactic of trying to scare the kids doesn't work. Do you know what they'll do? They'll hate the police. If something bad happens at their house, they won't talk to the police. They won't respect them, either.

*

It is not right what the police do to the youth here. I don't like anything to do with the police here. If the police talk to the youth like human beings, if they respect them, and talk nice to them, the youth will be talking nice to them, too. It goes both ways to be respectful.

*

The police will have their own problems and attitudes and bring them to the workplace. The police have the wrong impression of us. It's because of the attitude they have about Jane-Finch. They come here thinking we are all criminals. If it wasn't for the media, I guarantee police attitudes towards us would be different. Most of us are intelligent people, not criminals.

*

It's not a matter of good or bad. We do need the police, but they have an attitude of power and right. That isn't helpful. We were told there is nothing we can do, so we have to adapt to them. The police won't meet us half-way.

When the police go out, what face do they show to the community? People remember the pain, not the good parts. If they hug you yesterday, but beat you tomorrow, you'll only remember the beating.

I meet some police who are willing to help, who will play with the kids. People ask why police stop us on the way to work, stop and ask us for ID. We would get a lot more crimes solved if not for the police attitude. Talk quietly and listen.

I've seen kids be rude to the police - they can't act like that. Police should understand and not lash out. You'll get to know the good officers from the bad ones, just by their attitude when they approach you.

Once they put your name in the system, it's not coming out. The police have the power to remove you from your life. Whether you're guilty or not, it gives you a sense of powerlessness.

You might call the police to help you, but you don't want the person removed. You might call to make the beating stop, but the police will come and make the situation worse.

We create monsters out of the police to scare our kids, but that turns against us. The experience the kids have with police and jail makes them worse. I knew who someone got sent to a mental health centre after she was arrested. I thought she would finally be treated and get the help she needed. Instead, she absorbed all the negative traits from the drug dealers and violent people who were also there.

¹ From <http://www.torontopolice.on.ca/tavis/>: “The Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy (TAVIS) is an intensive, violence reduction and community mobilization strategy intended to reduce crime and increase safety in our neighbourhoods.”

“TAVIS is led by the Toronto Police Service. Partners include Toronto Community Housing and City of Toronto departments such as Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Toronto Public Health, Social Development, Finance and Administration, Toronto Office of Partnerships and others.”

“An essential part of TAVIS is engagement with community members. It becomes the support system necessary to deal more effectively with the root causes of crime. The success of TAVIS is not based on the number of arrests made but on the reduction in crime, enhancement of public trust and confidence, and the building of relationships within the communities most affected by violence.”

Relationships

Love makes the world go round. Doesn't it?

Sometimes a woman needs a man. Someone to be your partner and be there when your world is falling apart. But most men don't understand. When I go to school or go to work, I still have to come home, cook, clean up the house, do the laundry.

*

Men want you to mind them. I ask them, what are you bringing to the table? I'm working, I'm a professional, but they want to tell me what to do with my life. They don't want to help you. I'm not going to mind him. He's supposed to take care of me or at least not sit around all day, especially if I'm working too. Now, I look after myself. I dumped one man because he wouldn't stay loyal to me. If you're going to have me, you have to have me alone.

*

In every relationship, there are signals and flashing lights that should be paid attention because they pave the way for other things. Sometimes a person is infatuated, the chemicals are rushing, and the person turns a blind eye. Personally, I chose not to have children early, not even in my marriage because I wanted to see how things were going to work. I didn't want to become a woman forced to raise a child all by herself.

So I took it slow when it came to children. I even told the man I married that I didn't want to raise a child by myself. He was respectful of that. We waited for seven years and then it was time. I made up my mind to take that step, and I'm happy I did.

*

All in all, I've been able to build a nice thick wall around me to keep others at a distance. Sometimes, I do miss having someone close, but I don't feel that way very often. Like I said, I built a good wall. It helps that none of my relationships were much fun after the early part. The biggest problem is that whoever I was with would find a big list of things wrong with me.

Some of the flaws were common (my bad), and maybe I could work on them, but what really annoyed me is how each potential partner candidate would find a whole new pile of imperfections with me. So generally, I'd be the one to end things. The way I see it, if there are so many things that you want to change about me, what exactly is there that you like about me? Better to end it so you can find someone closer to your ideal. If I'm a Hyundai Accent and you really have your heart set on a Cadillac, we're both better off if you go visit a Cadillac dealer.

Politics

Pondering people, politicians, and protest.

Politicians are only nice to us when they want our vote. They are useless, all of them. I knew one politician, whenever he would see me, he would say to me, "Oh, are you going to vote for me, will you volunteer for me?" and now when he sees me, he doesn't say hello. He lost the election, but it's not my fault he lost.

*

It bothers me when people say that government should be run like a business. In theory I agree, but only if we mean that government should be run like a successful business. Instead, it seems that too many people who say this (often politicians) equate "running a business" with "cutting costs." And that's it. Pull out the scissors and cut, cut, cut.

I can't think of many businesses that have been successful in the long-term with a strategy based on cutting costs. There's nothing wrong with cutting fat. There's definitely nothing wrong with becoming more efficient. However, once the scissors become the prime strategy, eventually it's muscle and vital organs that get cut. Successful businesses invest wisely in their companies. That's what governments should do.

Look at where spending money gets the biggest result. What helps communities grow? What kind of programs keep people healthy and inspires them to succeed? I'm all for cutting wasteful spending, but who gets to decide what is wasteful?

When someone insists on cutting money from social programs now when the end result is that we'll spend more money on jails later, that person is either a short-sighted simpleton or is someone who will benefit from these cuts. Maybe it's someone who plans to invest in a private jail.

I remember this from 2010. I was knocking on doors helping a friend's political campaign. At one door, there was an older gentleman who said to me, "I don't have any kids going to school now. Why should any of my tax money go to the school system?"

Since I didn't want to turn him against my candidate, I nodded as if he had said something wise and insightful. My private reaction was the exact opposite. Sure, why pay taxes for education if your children aren't going to school anymore? How else could you benefit from schools?

I mean, it's not like an educated workforce makes more money, which can then get taxed and pay for your old age pension, and pave the roads, and get the snow cleared off your sidewalk. It's not like someone's child might get educated and come up with a business idea that will generate jobs, or that someone else's child might become a scientist and discover something that could help you ease your pains, cure a loved one's illness, or possibly even help you regain your hair (I'm still waiting on that one).

It's better to keep that money in your pocket. I'm sure it will go so much farther towards improving your lot in life.

Sarcasm aside, it concerns me that so many politicians (with help from the media) have conditioned people to become so short-sighted and self-centred. Maybe it's that a lot of people don't trust politicians to handle their tax money wisely. I understand because we see so many examples of tax money being wasted by various levels of government.

Giving governments less money won't stop them from wasting it. Keep an eye on the people you elect. Marking a ballot every so often is only the minimum. Get informed about what's going on. Demand value for your tax money. Write letters to your elected representatives. Get your neighbours to sign them, or write their own. A successful business is able to face the public and open the books to shareholders. Ask for explanations and don't accept sound bites in place of discussion.

At the same time, try to see the bigger picture. We're all in this together, so why not work together for the greater good?

*

It's probably not intentional (is my paranoia showing?), but when it comes to getting things done politically, the dice are somewhat stacked against Jane-Finch. Most of the day to day issues that people face belong to the municipal level of government. This includes subsidized housing, Ontario Works, transit, police, community centres, and parks. That's the responsibility of Toronto City Hall and your local councillor. There are a lot of people in Jane-Finch, so you'd think if we all got together, we could pressure our councillor and get things done.

That's not how things line up. The Jane-Finch area is divided between Wards 7, 8, and 9. If you live on either side of Jane Street north of Finch, you're in Ward 8 and so it stays south of Finch on the east side until you come to Grandravine. Then you're in Ward 9. The apartments and social housing that are south of Finch and on the west side of Jane? That's part of Ward 7.

What are the political implications? Suppose there's an issue at the housing complex on Dune Grassway or one of the apartment buildings on Firgrove Crescent (they are located next to each other). The problem is that if the Ward 7 councillor wants to look at issues that will garner the most votes, there are a lot of voters living in houses over in the Finch-Islington area. Though you wouldn't know it if you simply drove along Jane Street, there is a huge residential development inside that southwest corner of Jane and Finch, with even more located further south in the Jane-Sheppard area. That makes for a large group of voters that complement the ones in Finch-Islington.

If you live in the Grassways, your instinct might be to join forces with the people living in Yorkwoods Village across the street from you on Jane Street, but they don't live in your Ward. You'd have to try and connect with the apartments down at Jane and Chalkfarm, or the housing complex over at Ardwick Boulevard. Neither is particularly close, especially if you don't have a car.

It's the same deal with the southeast corner of Jane-Finch. TCH manages a great deal of housing in the area bounded by Jane, Finch, and Sheppard Avenue West, but Grandravine Drive divides it between Wards 8 and 9, going right through the centre of Yorkwoods Village.

I think it would be better if the Jane-Finch area had one councillor rather than three. Other Toronto neighbourhoods are basically located within one political boundary, such as Regent Park (Ward 28), Malvern (Ward 42), and Lawrence Heights (Ward 15).

I saw this happen in the past few municipal elections, where at least one would-be challenger looked at the population of Jane-Finch and thought building support in the area would help them upset the incumbent. Whether

it was Ward 7 or Ward 8, the candidate thought this strategy would secure a strong showing, not realizing that a lot of the people just can't vote for you.

And it works the other way, too. As a candidate, you're only allowed to spend so much in an election campaign. Maybe in your heart, you really want to do something for Jane-Finch, but the cold numbers tell you that your campaign needs to go where the votes are. So the people of Jane-Finch (those that are in your Ward) don't see you, which means they won't vote for you. People are told they need to go out and vote, yet in a system like ours, there are so many ways that their vote doesn't really matter.

My Story - Eight (Female)

“The system has made our marriage a long distance relationship.”

I met the man who would be my husband in June 2004 right at the intersection of Jane Street and Sheppard Avenue. I was on the way to visit my sister who lived in the area at the time. He approached me while I was waiting for the bus. I remember him being a complete gentleman which is the only reason he was able to get and keep my attention.

We were both twenty-three years old when we eloped at the North York Civic Centre, June 2005, on his birthday, in the presence of my sister and the father of her children. We kept it quiet for a while because our families thought it was too soon and we were too young.

My husband was going back and forth to court since 2001 dealing with some trouble he found himself in as a youth. When the trial was over, he was told to leave the country. I remember the staff at 6900 Airport Road saying, “Well, it's time to take a vacation.”¹

We thought so too, but some vacation it turned out to be, nearly nine years later. He departed two months earlier than the deadline, tired of fighting the system and eager to make things right. The fact that he had been here in Canada since the age of eleven and graduated from high school (Grade Thirteen with honors and receiving his Ontario Secondary School Diploma), didn't seem to make much of a difference. I guess when you're caught up in the system you are a number rather than an individual being.

I have made my relationship work, and it's been long-distance for a very long time. He's on the Islands and I'm here, so I have to travel back and forth to make things work until he's able to get back to Canada. We have both managed to make it work.

I will never forget this one time that I traveled in 2009. I was returning from Jamaica on an evening flight. We landed and I retrieved my belongings and continued to customs. I was told to go to the back for a secondary examination which turned into a nightmare.

I believe there was a rookie on shift that night looking to make his first big break because he mistakenly held me in detainment for suspicion of illegal narcotics in or on my body. I was held in custody and ill-treated for over eighteen hours by the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA).

They wanted me to remove my clothing to be searched and when I refused, about three to four officers stripped off all my clothing down to nothing. They made me squat and shined flashlights into my private area. They also brought me to a cell and locked me in, slamming chairs against the door so I couldn't sleep.

I was really tired. The officers provoked me, told me I was lying about having nothing, presumed me guilty without a trial. I was even forced to have bowel movements and when I tried about three times, they said it wasn't enough. According to them, I couldn't leave until I produced a sufficient amount.

After much torture, I asked for the senior officer and told them I needed medical attention. I was rushed to the hospital through the airport, with many people watching. The doctor was able to give me an ultrasound as I was experiencing stomach pains after the strain. He reported back that I had nothing foreign in my abdomen.

When CBSA saw this they had no choice but to release me after escorting me out to the hospital and back to the airport in handcuffs. People were looking at me like I was a criminal. It was one of the worse days of my life. Up to this very day, I feel violated.

I've never been the same since then. Never received any justice besides a letter with somewhat of a lousy apology and a promise for a smooth path in future travels. My doctor keeps a close eye on me.

This makes my husband and I very nervous when it's time to travel. I thought about relocating to Jamaica but I am a full-time worker with benefits. I have plans to return to school to pursue International Business Administration and we are expecting our first child. This distance is hindering our progress because we don't know what to expect.

For the last seven years or so, we want to be together so much in our relationship, but instead there's this big obstacle making it so difficult for us. Every time we take two steps forward, here comes another obstacle and we have to take ten steps back. There's always this wedge. We all make mistakes and have to pay for them, but in this case I'm sure it's been over ten years since it's been paid for.

Every time you think you're progressing, the bureaucrats throw something else at you. "You have to do this," or "we need this," or "the law's changed," or "the fees have gone up."

I have been trying to get my husband here for so long now. In a way, it's almost like a "forbidden love," and it certainly has the potential to become something very powerful. My husband left in 2006, and since 2007 we have been working on reuniting. We have to go through the paperwork, his pardons, and need more money for his fees. All the traveling to and from Jamaica is getting quite expensive as well. We could be using those funds to buy real estate.

It's only a matter of time. We chose not to use a lawyer and face this on our own. I think when the bureaucrats see that we're not using a lawyer, they make it a little harder. Lawyers talk the language and know what to do to get ahead. Here we are, two individuals who think we can work against that and they push us back. But we're determined. And we're very close. When we do get there, we'll be very appreciative of what we have because we know what it's like to not have it.

Lawyers can play with you because they know you're vulnerable and I have watched a lot of people go through that as well. We originally thought about getting a lawyer, and I watched friends and people I know get abused by their lawyer and nothing really came out of it. I have a friend who paid a lawyer \$1500 and she did not even get her application sent in because she couldn't contact the lawyer again. It's those kind of things that made my spouse and I very nervous and decide to take the plunge and do it ourselves.

Now I'm seeing how the immigration system and the justice system will work with you if you don't have those resources and you're not using a lawyer and paying so many thousands of dollars. If you're a little fish in a big tank of sharks, they just don't have time to deal with you and they keep pushing you back unless you're very determined. It takes longer to get where you need to go when you don't spend the money. It's all about money, I guess. And maybe there's also a question of who you know.

Our struggle has been a long one. My husband was eighteen when he got into the trouble that got him sent back, and now when he's trying to live a productive life, those little things come back to haunt him.

Although he wants to make things right, they want to keep him in the system, they want to keep a tab on him, they want to know what's going on - they don't want to let him go. It's hard for him to get out of that. It's the Canadian government that is creating the problems. I was born here, but he was not. But what about my basic human rights? What about my right to love and be loved - does that have to come with a large price tag?

Notes

¹ There is a Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) office located at 6900 Airport Road, Mississauga.

Closing Words

We've spoken, and now we're here to listen. Please send your comments to voicesmatter@jfotm.com

We want to publish reactions on our web site. Let's start dialogues between people, organizations, community leaders, and anyone else who has ideas, opinions, and stories to share. Our goal is for this book to be the start of something bigger.

If you'd like to order a copy of this book, go to our web site located at www.jfotm.com

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Last but definitely not least, the Jane/Finch Family and Community Centre (<http://www.janefinchcentre.org/>) has played a vital role in the development of our group. To this day, the Centre supports Jane-Finch On The Move with space and resources.

Jane-Finch On The Move

Angelo Furlan (Chair), Amina (Safy) Abouzaid (Vice-Chair), Mahmoud Abouzaid, Mohamed Adelrahim, Alicia Bartholomew-Shaw, Sandy Bartholomew, Maize Blanchard, Celena Knight, Mavis Lewis, Marcia Panton, Wesley Parks, Walter Poremski, Chavenne Stamp

The full version of this book is also available in Kindle format from the following online sources:

Amazon.ca <http://preview.tinyurl.com/oygnmay>

Amazon.com: <http://preview.tinyurl.com/qgqxa8b>

Amazon.uk: <http://preview.tinyurl.com/nvn8gm6>



Toronto's Jane and Finch is one of the most recognizable neighbourhoods in Canada. In **Voices Matter**, area residents tell their stories and express their opinions on a variety of topics. Here are a few samples:

So I didn't have the operation. My husband said, "I'll give you the operation right now." He put my arms behind my back and he kicked me in my stomach. He beat me and said, "I'll make the baby come out now."



I want to continue on this path so my daughter can see that even though I had situations that I could have used as excuses, I did not. I don't want her to end up in the position that I was in. I definitely don't want to be a thirty year old grandmother.



I froze. The first thing that came to mind was to call someone and get help. So I reached into my pocket and then I was told not to make a move or I will know what a bullet in the back feels like!