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Katherine Gavier on discovering Audubon
Chasing Audubon

While reading the journals of John James Audubon, the writer Katherine Govier made a chance discovery that was to send her on the trail of the American naturalist.

It is spring, 1998. I am standing in an airy room at the Toronto Reference Library, and I am staring at a life-sized print of the white pelican. It is more than 160 years old and undimmed by time. The bird stares me down, mysterious and defiant despite its tissue-paper cover. I had never imagined bird art to be so bold, so intimate, so intensely personal.

This is how I discovered John James Audubon's The Birds of America. I was writer-in-residence with the Toronto Public Library, which includes all the city's branches, and, as such, was given a chance to see its special collection of rare and valuable works. The library owns one of an estimated 110 complete copies of the masterpiece, chiefly because Dr. James Steen, chief librarian from 1893 to 1908, convinced the library to buy the work in 1902. It paid $1,900, a huge sum at the time; today the volume is worth more than $10 million.
I was unprepared for the impact of the enormous, double elephant folio (97 by 66 centimeters), hand-colored prints that together make up the masterpiece. I had not seen Audubon's northern prints at the time. His "Canadian" birds (the great carnivorous, the loon, the Arctic tern, the eider duck) were out at this moment on a travelling exhibit, curated by the Montreal Audubon expert David Lant, that told of Audubon's sailing journey in the summer of 1833 up the perilous north shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence to find the nests of seagulls or birds.

Audubon's prints trapped me. Extraordinarily beautiful, they leap out of their own time and seem to stand outside of us as well. And they come with a heroic story, a story of one man, an outsider, a renegade even, pursued by the buffal, who followed the birds to their nests in the wilderness, watched and copied them, hired an engraver and self-published an epoch-making work, aided only by his wife and sons. But the story is not without its dark side. To depict the detail accurately without the benefit of binoculars or cameras, Audubon regularly drew dead birds, which he or members of his crew killed for the purpose.

Reading Audubon's journal in the Toronto Reference Library's Baldwin Room, I found the entries covering his "Labrador" journey (the area he visited is now part of Quebec) of June, July and August 1833 drop-outingly sparse. There is a reason. Audubon was a man of secrets and lies, and in preparing the journals for publication, an overzealous grandnephew had "edited" the entries and destroyed most of the originals to protect his reputation. Nonetheless, it was clear the journey championed the famous hunter and ornithologist.

But here was a fact that few seemed to have noted: on this journey into storm and peril, Audubon was not alone. On June 22, 1833, while anchored at American Harbour, or Little Natahaquan, Que., Audubon's schooner encountered another sailing vessel, one captained by Henry Welles Bayfield of the Royal Navy. The Galleon was charged with surveying the north shore of the lower St. Lawrence and producing charts that would make the passage safe for navigation.

I met Captain (later Admiral) Bayfield, as Audubon did by chance. I wondered about him, mind you, the man after whom a number of places in Eastern Canada are named, the man who surveyed the Great Lakes in small boats with only one assistant. You only have to pilot a boat through a rock-studded channel in the Georgian Bay archipelago to want to shake the hands of those intrepid Royal Navy surveyors who made the first charts.

As luck would have it, Bayfield, too, wrote journals.

And I came upon this entry: "Mr. Audubon on board, the Naturalist ... and we found him a very superior person indeed."

This is how novels happen. I had the proverbial chill up the spine. Bayfield, Audubon. Two men with missions, eyeball by eyeball, days from anywhere, making parallel, but opposed, journeys, one seeking wilderness, the other paving the path for civilization. I was doubly hooked. All at once, thrilled and daunted. I stared three years of hard labour in the face. And I knew I had to take their journey.

I wanted to see Audubon and Bayfield talk about over dinner. What did Audubon and Bayfield talk about over dinner, I wonder, as I continue to watch the eagles circle overhead. Birds, I suppose. The necessity of maps to make sailing safer. There were many shipswrecks and terrible stories of survivors slowly starving to death over the winter, whaling ships that wrecked the coast, and schooners whose decks were so laden with cod that they barely moved. The name codfish is derived from the 1500's. In 1343, Jacques Cartier famously gave the peninsula the epithet "the land God gave to Cain."

Since then, the water and the wilderness have been harvested not only by seasonally visiting them but also by seakins, "eggers" (who raided the nurseries of the sea for food) and fur traders from Europe and America. There are a scant few thousand "browsers" (those who live here all year), many mixed-race people descended from Jersey fishermen, Irish and English settlers, Montagnais, Innu and Inuit.

Audubon's pilot, whom the painter had hired to take him north "where no ornithologist had ever gone," refused to approach the nesting sites because the rocky passages were so treacherous. Audubon hoped the surveyor would help him. (In fact, it ended up being the ornithologist who assisted the Royal Navy.) Audubon went on board the Galleon, and later in his stay in this barbour was invited for dinner.

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Audubon stayed two weeks in this deep, secure harbour, where he found and painted the great courmorant, the red-throated diver (loon) and the willow ptarmigan.
A Fundamental Responsibility

In the wake of a series of corporate scandals, Imperial Oil's chairman Tim Hearn discusses the issue of corporate ethics and responsibility.

Readers of the review will, I'm quite sure, have been as disturbed as I have by the recent series of scandals involving major corporations. Some senior executives, directors, and external auditors of high-profile public corporations have been accused of engaging in business and financial reporting practices that are clearly unethical, if not fraudulent. These alleged actions have wreaked harm on communities, employees and their families, and shareholders of the companies concerned. Thousans of jobs have been lost. Shares that only a short while ago were valued in the hundreds of dollars have plummeted. Investors have sustained significant losses, and some individuals have seen their pensions drain to almost nothing.

These cases have cast a shadow of doubt over the free enterprise system and left investors wary. Clearly, legal, business and financial institutions that are at the core of our social, economic and political way of life depend on public and investor confidence. The completeness and reliability of corporate financial statements and other business-related information is vital.

Corporations are required by law to have their financial statements audited by independent accountants, who must certify that the statements, in their opinion, "present fairly, in all material respects, the results of operations and the cash flows of the company." When audited financial statements do not honestly reflect corporate performance, the repercussions may be felt across our society. Individual and institutional investors are unable to make prudent investments. Financial institutions such as banks and insurers are hindered in making informed decisions. Employees are deprived of the ability to make career decisions based upon expectations of a company's future prospects. Customers can be misled into buying products and services, and suppliers into bidding for supply contracts. Economists and other analysts cannot properly assess the state of an industry. In short, the fundamental reliability of corporate financial information is an essential element underpinning our free enterprise system.
I believe that society for the past 100 or more years has been structured by a single entity, the corporation, which has grown to encompass all aspects of life. Corporations are organized for the purpose of maximizing profits, and they do so by violating laws and regulations. I believe that corporations are the root cause of many of the problems we face today, including poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation.

As for the efficacy of the free enterprise, free market economic system under which all we live, I have long ago abandoned my views of the writer and critic, Benjamin Franklin, who wrote in his book "The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism" that "all of the systems of political economy which have shaped our history, have so revolutionized human expectations as to make human life, at times, seem a mere sorry and unprofitable time, and to dispose people to think of it as a mere trifle, a mere object to be despised and neglected."

I believe that corporations are the root cause of many of the problems we face today, including poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation.

I am convinced that there is a strong and urgent need for corporations to take responsibility for their actions, ethically and in accordance with the law.
In a busy downtown Toronto diner, Junior Kayi sinks into a faded maroon booth and begins sipping on his black coffee. It's his lunch break, but the young Congolese refugee-turned-businessman doesn't order any food; instead he chooses to run on caffeine and his own kinetic energy. He chatters enthusiastically about his job and the city, but when asked how he found his way to Canada, his eyes lose their sparkle. In a soft-spoken voice, he recounts his harrowing tale.

Until he was 18, Kayi lived with his family — his brother and parents — in Brazzaville, capital of the Republic of the Congo, a country that was racked by political unrest and civil war during the early 1990s. In Kayi's neighbourhood, the fighting erupted early in the morning.

"At 3 or 4 a.m., people came in and just started shooting at anything that was moving," says Kayi. His father, mother and brother were killed. "I hid myself under my bed, and before I knew it, there was a guy walking around my house, looking to see if there was anyone alive," he says. "I was traumatized. I couldn't come out for five hours. When I did, I found the bodies of my father, mother and brother."

Later that day, a neighbour and family friend found the terrified 18-year-old. Concerned more for the young man's life than her own, she found him a safe haven across the Congo River in what was then Zaire. It took several weeks, but through the neighbour's connections, Kayi was able to leave Africa and, eventually, come to Canada.

On arrival in Toronto, Kayi claimed refugee status. He knew nothing of the city. The French-speaking Kayi was referred to the Francophone Centre, an agency funded by the United Way. The centre's staff found him a place to stay at the Covenant House youth centre. While there, he learned English and took an intensive training program in computers and business at a youth employment centre at St. Stephen's Community House, another agency sponsored by the United Way.

Today, Kayi says it was the memory of his family and help from the United Way agencies that encouraged him to strive for a better life. He plans to open the first Congolese community centre in Toronto and to one day become an immigration lawyer so he can help others like himself. But, Kayi says, until he is solidly on his feet, the work he is doing today as an auditor for a collection agency comes first. He picks up his reports and dunks out of the diner, surname not to be away from the office too long.

United Way agencies have helped thousands of victims of war, many with equally harrowing tales. They have also helped millions of other people. The United Way estimates that it assists one in three Canadians, largely through raising funds for agencies that provide shelter, relief from hunger, counselling for families and individuals in crisis, and myriad...
other services. The United Way acts as a community collective, raising funds for participating agencies through one appeal, which eases the overhead costs of fundraising for individual agencies and reduces donor fatigue.

In fact, the United Way was its own in the community collectives that began to develop in the late 1930s. The first community collective is believed to have been started in Denver, Colorado, by the Charity Organization Society, as it was called, which established in 1887 in an effort to help deal with the problems that had arisen as a result of the rapid swelling of the town's population during the gold rush (between 1859 and 1900, the population grew from 5,000 to almost 80,000). The town's infrastructure wasn't prepared for such rapid growth. Charitable groups were strained, and new ones sprang up. They found themselves competing with one another for funds and supplies. Some didn't fare as well as others, and a number of essential organizations found themselves without sufficient funds or supplies to meet the needs of their constituents. So, driven by necessity, a group of local religious leaders decided that the answer lay in creating one community campaign. Other communities had the same idea.

The success of the community collective philosophy reached Canada just before the 1920s. Community collectives similar to the one in Denver were started by Catholic, Protestant and Jewish charities in Montreal and Toronto in 1917, and in other Canadian cities over time. Following the Second World War, many community collectives were established in smaller Canadian centres to distribute the remains of the "war chest" funds collected to help in the war effort. They directed funds toward non-governmental health and social service agencies.

The collectives took different names, including Community Chest, the Red Feather Campaign, United Appeal and United Community Services. In some communities, they were formed by the business sector, in others by a group of donors or funded agencies. But however they began, they shared a common objective — to raise money for and direct funds to those in need.

It wasn't until the 1970s that the collectives around the world united under the United Way name and logo, with each country's organization operating independently. In Canada today, there are 125 United Ways (those in Quebec go by the name of the Centraide), which together fund 7,000 social and health service agencies. The United Way of Canada, a national organization headquartered in Ottawa, provides training and leadership to the various United Ways across the country, and supports and approves the creation of new organizations.

The United Way has been tremendously effective in raising funds, doubling the amount it raised and distributed every decade from the 1940s to the 1980s. "In 2001," says Al Harlow, president of the United Way of Canada, "United Ways-Centraides raised nearly $350 million, which is now being directed to support local initiatives."

The majority of United Way funds are raised through corporate campaigns. "There is a perception that the lion's share comes from the corporations themselves. But in fact, 60 percent of all donations in Canada come from individual employees," says Susan McIsaac of the United Way of Greater Toronto. Thirty percent is donated by the corporations themselves, with 10 percent coming from the general public.

"Imperial runs one of the model campaigns," remarks McIsaac, noting that it is one of only 30 or so organizations in Canada to contribute more than a million dollars in a single year. Last year marked the sixth consecutive year Imperial was a recipient of the Thanks a Million national award. In 2001, contributions from Imperial employees and associates alone totalled more than $1.3 million, while the company itself contributed $904,000.

"Imperial and its employees and annuitants should feel proud for having contributed more than $11 million to the United Way and Centraide over the last six years," says Harlow. "That's an incredible contribution to the lives of people in communities and helps to build stronger, healthier communities for us all."

But Imperial does much more than simply raise funds for the United Way. As part of its campaign, it also participates in the Days of Caring programs, through which employees volunteer at United Way agencies. Last September, for example, employees from Imperial planted trees at the Toronto Zoo with a group called Yourths Assisting Youth, a peer mentoring program through which volunteers aged 16 to 29 are matched with at-risk children and teens aged 6 to 18. "It was an extremely rewarding experience," says Cory Dow, a financial planner at Imperial who has been coordinating Days of Caring for Toronto-area employees for five years. "It was an opportunity to help kids, to do something for the environment, and to think about the importance of the work United Way agencies do." And it's not just employees who gain an awareness of the agencies. Those who volunteer tend to bring their families to help out, says Dow. In fact, for the 2001 project, a third of the volunteers were employees; the rest were family members.

"The support I feel is more than I can put into words"
In the early 1990s, the United Way faced one of its greatest challenges. The government started to make massive cuts in its funding to health and social services, and many agencies looked to the United Way to help make up for the shortfall. "It was a time for real soul-searching," says Joanne Lincini, chief executive officer of the United Way of Halifax Region. The organization had to sharpen its focus. "Today, we concentrate on four areas—helping young children and their families thrive, increasing well-being and self-sufficiency, increasing safety and reducing violence, and building stronger volunteer organizations," she explains. "But we not only provide funds, we work with agencies to ensure that they are maximizing their potential."

One of the many people who have been helped by the United Way in Halifax is Jennifer Gallant. Five years ago, her son, Danny, was born with cerebral palsy and other physical complications. Gallant didn't know how she would cope with a severely disabled child. She is, however, coping very well today. Today, Danny attends Wee Care Developmental Centre, an integrated child-care facility supported by the United Way. It is the only such facility in Nova Scotia that has physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy on-site on a regular basis. The advantage of having all those services in one place, explains Gallant, is that her son gets to spend the whole day doing his program as opposed to going back and forth to the children's hospital for appointments. "The support I feel is more than I can put into words," she says. "He's doing fabulously. He sees, he hears, he recognizes, he studies, he laughs. He has no speech, but he makes lots of noise."

Despite United Way support, says Gallant, the system can be hard to navigate for parents. The 26-year-old mother has made it her mission to provide support and direction to other parents: "In Danny's short life, I have probably talked to hundreds of parents whose children have challenges of some sort or other. The experience has given Gallant the resolve to go back to school. "Before Danny, my thoughts of a career and a job were not what they are now. After everything I have been through, I know that I will go back to school and to university," Gallant hopes eventually to take courses in family medicine. "That would never have crossed my mind before Danny. He has taught me a lot."

Francis Lunkin, president and chief executive officer of the United Way of Greater Toronto, wants the stories of people like Danny and Jennifer Gallant to be heard. "Canadians need to hear the stories and to get to know the individuals who receive assistance, so they can truly understand the value of the work done by the agencies and the United Way."

Today in Canada, the United Way faces the challenge of remaining relevant to a public that has a growing number of groups competing for its donation dollars, not just locally but internationally.

These days people witness suffering around the world daily on television and are being inundated by requests to give globally. Interestingly enough, these appeals don't detract from the United Way's ability to raise funds. In fact, tragedies such as the September 11 terrorist attack seem to have increased people's sense of local community. Thinking globally and acting locally are connected. Lunkin points out. Global issues tend to highlight the general need to act. "We know that where we have the greatest impact as individuals is in our own community," she says. "Building strong, safe and healthy communities can give us a sense of security for ourselves and our families."

Allen Bencharksi, an individual who had always been on the giving end, is grateful he had a United Way agency to turn to when his wife, Jannae, died from leukemia two years ago. At the time of Jannae's death, the couple had recently adopted Alex (now 10), the elder of their two foster children, and were in the process of adopting their other foster child, Xena (now seven). Jannae's illness was lengthy. The family watched her battle the cancer through chemotherapy, a stem-cell transplant and a bone-marrow transplant. "I didn't have any support," Allen explains. "One of the hardest parts was telling my kids that this could be it."

After Jannae's death, Alex's school noticed the emotional strain he was under and suggested that the family get help from the Langley Hospice Society, an agency that provides support to those in grief. The hospice has been a tremendous help, says Allen. "It helped the kids to be able to talk about their mother. They don't say that she has passed away—they know she has died and is never coming back. Before getting help from the society, they hadn't been able to express their feelings properly."

The hospice support has helped Allen not only to understand his feelings but to move on with his life. Recently, he has begun to take courses so that one day he will be able to help other people who are grieving. "It's been a year and a half, but I still have some days when it's just really in my face, and my emotions are right there," he says. "I don't know where I would be without the hospice and the United Way, but I know I wouldn't be where I am today."

For Allen, Janine Karyl, Jennifer Gallant and millions of others, the United Way has provided support and practical assistance—and the gift of hope.
Investing in Cleaner Air

By late 2003, as a result of a $500-million investment, the sulphur content of Imperial’s gasoline will be among the lowest in the world.

By Russell Belton

"So what's the deal with Etho's dirty gasoline?" my friend asked as we sat in our seats — rather too high above the ice — between periods at a recent Saturday-night hockey game. "I read that there's more sulphur in your gasoline than in anyone else's."

As a staff writer with Imperial Oil, I'm fairly accustomed to being the target of (usually) good-natured needling from my friends about gasoline pricing and other issues that concern the Canadian consumer, and I generally remain good-humoured as I try to put things in perspective. But references to "dirty gasoline" tend to get my back up, as the
Imperial's introduction of 30-ppm gasoline will coincide almost exactly with the time when 2004 model-year automobiles — those that need low-sulfur fuel to function effectively — will be available to customers.

Sulfur is an element that occurs naturally in crude oil, with more in some varieties than in others. Generally, the more sulfur that is present in a crude oil, the higher the sulfur content of the gasoline that is derived from it. Crude oils with a high sulfur content are referred to as "sweet"; those with a lower sulfur content are referred to as "sour." For obvious reasons, sour crude oils are cheaper than sweeter varieties, but this lower cost is largely offset by increased refining costs.

Historically, removing sulfur during refining has required additional processing and treatment, generally known as hydrocracking. Hydrocracking involves adding a catalyst to the fuel and subjecting it to high pressure and high temperatures. The catalyst breaks down the sulfur compounds into smaller, more stable compounds, which are then removed from the fuel.

Despite the fact that Canadian refineries have made substantial progress in removing sulfur from gasoline over the last several years, the level of sulfur in gasoline is still high enough to cause problems with some vehicles. In some cases, the sulfur content of gasoline can react with other components in the fuel system to create deposits that can affect the performance of the engine.

In 1996, Environment Canada launched a multi-stakeholder, multi-year program to reduce the level of sulfur in gasoline. The program was successful in reducing the level of sulfur in gasoline to 50 parts per million (ppm), which is considered a significant reduction.

The new regulations established a new sulfur limit of 30 ppm for gasoline in Canada. The new limit was set to reduce the level of sulfur in gasoline from 50 ppm to 30 ppm, which is a significant reduction. The new regulations also require that all gasoline sold in Canada must meet the new sulfur limit.

The new regulations were implemented on January 1, 2004. The new sulfur limit has been widely applauded for its ability to reduce the level of sulfur in gasoline and improve the quality of the air we breathe.
At its refineries in Strathcona, Alta., and Dartmouth, N.S., the company will use a proprietary new technology. Known as Scanfining, it removes sulphur while minimizing octane loss.

said it would invest $500 million in its four refineries in order to meet the new requirements. “We have always agreed with the need for gasoline to have a sulphur content of 30 ppm by 2005,” says Brian Fischer, Imperial’s senior vice-president, products and chemicals division. “However, we took issue with the interim-stage requirement because it produced no discernible environmental benefit while potentially increasing costs to the industry and consumer.”

To meet the interim-stage requirement of 150 ppm on average, Imperial said that it would advance the timetable for completing the installation of new sulphur-reduction technology, enabling it to begin producing 30-ppm gasoline by the fall of 2003, some 15 months ahead of the government-mandated deadline of January 1, 2005.

Despite the facts that the regulation specifically allows for the averaging of sulphur content and that Imperial is investing $500 million in new equipment, some environmentalists have claimed that because the company continued to produce gasoline containing more than 150 ppm of sulphur after July 1, 2000, it was failing to comply fully with the law.

“I want to make it very clear that Imperial is complying and will comply fully with the new regulation,” stresses Fischer. “The regulation is quite explicit. It allows averaging over the period to give refiners some flexibility in meeting the standard. The averaging provision recognizes the massive physical changes that have to be made to refiners. This is not something that can be done by turning a few valves. It is a huge undertaking, requiring the construction and installation of new plant equipment incorporating new technologies, the construction of pipelines and so forth, all of which must be done safely and responsibly. That takes time.” Fischer points out that it also takes people—people who have expertise and experience, both company employees and outside engineering and construction contractors. With refineries all around the world working toward essentially the same deadline, the availability of both hardware and people is limited.

“Forcing refiners to produce gasoline with an absolute sulphur content maximum of 150 ppm by mid-2002 and 30 ppm by the beginning of 2005 would have been akin to requiring a homeowner to purchase a new stove today and then throw it out and buy another one two years from now,” Fischer points out. “The fact is, it would have been physically impossible to install new equipment and processes by July 1, 2002. The government eventually recognized this and drafted the regulations accordingly.”

Imperial plans to meet the standards using a combination of traditional and new technologies. At its refineries in Strathcona, Alta., and Dartmouth, N.S., it will use a proprietary new process, developed by the research and engineering arm of ExxonMobil Corporation. Known as Scanfining, it removes sulphur while minimizing octane loss. In addition, an existing hydrotreater at the Dartmouth refinery will be upgraded. About $140 million will be spent at Strathcona and about $80 million at Dartmouth.

Imperial operates two refineries in Ontario—at Sarnia and at Nanticoke—both of which are in the southwestern region of the province. To enable these refineries to meet the new standard, the company is building a 61-kilometre pipeline between the two, which will transport untreated gasoline components produced at Sarnia for processing through new and upgraded sulphur-removal facilities at Nanticoke.

Canada’s refineries are tackling the sulphur-reduction challenge in different ways. Fischer notes that those refineries that process sweeter crude oils have an initial, although not necessarily long-term, advantage. “In Ontario, Imperial’s sulphur levels will be higher than the industry average for about the first half of the interim period,” he explains, “but much lower than the industry average in the second half as we install state-of-the-art technology.”

In fact, by late 2003, Imperial’s gasolines will have the lowest sulphur content in North America, with the exception of those produced in California. Moreover, the company’s introduction of 10-ppm gasoline will coincide almost exactly with the time when 2004 model-year automobiles, which need low-sulphur fuel to function effectively, will be available to consumers. It is these vehicles, with their new technology, that will be responsible for the lower emissions—low-sulphur gasoline is simply what those vehicles require if they are to be effective in lowering emissions.

The new regulations, Fischer points out, were promulgated after long and thorough consultations between Environment Canada and interested groups, including environmental groups. “All parties were fully aware of every provision at every stage of the consultative process,” he says.

The most critical question, of course, is what effect will dramatically reducing the sulphur content of gasoline have on the quality of the air we breathe in Canada?

“The real benefit from reducing sulphur levels in gasoline is that it will allow the new generation of emissions-control equipment to function effectively in further reducing emissions of compounds that contribute to smog,” explains Gilles Morel, a regulatory affairs advisor with Imperial’s safety, health and environmental department. “For this reason, the outlook is for greatly improved air quality, in spite of a projected increase in kilometres driven.”

“Emissions-control systems in new vehicles today remove about 97 percent of smog-generating compounds versus their counterparts of the mid-1970s,” Morel points out. “The new vehicle emissions-control systems, functioning effectively on low-sulphur fuels, will reduce emissions of NOx by 85 percent, and of VOCs by 75 percent. Of course, beyond 2005, as more and more older vehicles on the road are replaced by new, lower-emitting models, the overall improvement in air quality will become more and more pronounced,” he adds. “And that doesn’t even take into account possible further developments such as the advent of hybrid electric vehicles and, eventually, fuel-cell powered vehicles that could further reduce emissions. The link between emissions from gasoline-powered vehicles and air quality will effectively be broken.”

The salient point in all this, notes Fischer, is that by the fall of 2003, as Imperial completes its $500-million program to upgrade and install new facilities at its refineries, the sulphur content of its gasolines will be among the lowest in the world.
The actors and musicians get lots of credit for their involvement, but we don't work nearly as hard as Lisa," says the actor Lou Diamond Phillips, one of the group's most enthusiastic supporters. "We help get the message over and put a very public face on the movement. But Lisa is the true hero. She's the den mother gathering the troops."

Cherniak's emergence as one of North America's most accomplished social artists was hardly foreseeable in 1989, when she completed her bachelor of science degree at Ontario's University of Guelph and returned home to Toronto. After a short stint in the dot-com business, she enrolled in some evening courses in journalism at what was then Ryerson Polytechnical Institute (now Ryerson University) and began working as a freelance writer for newspapers and radio. "I thought that as a journalist I could have more power than politicians and lawyers to change the world," she says. While she continues to do freelance work today, journalism has become her "evening job," displaced by social activism as her daytime vocation.

The early 1990s were watershed years for Toronto's nascent relations, recalls Cherniak. The white supremacist Heritage Front was agitating in schools and universities and established a telephone hotline. As well, a Toronto area man set up the largest "hate rock" record label in North America.

Cherniak, the youngest of three daughters in a Jewish family, was sufficiently troubled by the situation to write a newspaper article about her own experiences with bigotry. She described how, while working as an intern at a racetrack, she confronted a horse trainer who made anti-Semitic remarks. "Racism cannot be fought by our remaining aloof," she wrote. "Passivity only allowed such shameful events as the Holocaust to occur."

The article triggered some hate mail, but Cherniak also received a letter of congratulations from Mendelson Joe, a Toronto musician and artist. After a lengthy phone chat with him, Cherniak hit upon the idea for the poster campaign, against racism and persuaded the musicians to do a painting for the poster.

Cherniak then had postcards of the poster mailed and, in a bid to enlist support, sent them to several artists, including Joe's friends Raffi, the children's entertainer, and Neil Peart, drummer for the rock band Rush. They were the first artists to join the campaign, donating funds and their names for the poster.

Why the emphasis on recruiting celebrities? "Kids learn from those they relate to," says Cherniak. "They project toward the stars. So we go after the people kids idolize."

Cherniak made slow progress in recruiting artists. "It was hard for her to live at the beginning," recalls Joan Benso of the Canadian band Prairie Oyster and an early supporter of Artists Against Racism. "Just getting to the artists was a huge task. Artists receive so many requests to do this and that."

The Toronto artist, however, was a person not to be stopped, says Bono, Cherniak enlisted Leonard Cohen by sending him a letter she closed with a four-word Buddhist mantra. (Both she and Cohen practice Buddhism.) When she spotted the actor Ralph Fiennes in a hotel bar during the Toronto International Film Festival, she seized the moment to introduce herself and her organization, then left Artists Against Racism literature for him at the hotel's front desk. Her efforts paid off. Fiennes became an Artists Against Racism member.

Since 1993, more than 100 leading Canadian and American artists have joined the Artists Against Racism campaign. They include recording stars B.B. King, Celine Dion and Lenney Kravitz, actors Sarah Polley and Don Ayrkoyd, and authors Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro and Pierre Berton. But it's not only the glitterati who have rolled around Cherniak. In the mid-1990s, when she faced the uphill task of having to contact each of the many Ontario school boards to buy approval for her poster campaign, those involved in education offered tremendous support, helping out by distributing material. Another low-profile supporter was Trace Poulson, an American photographer who learned of Artists Against Racism in 1999 through a magazine article. Inspired by Cherniak's activism, he helped organize a Peace in the Park concert in his hometown of Marion, Indiana, to counter a Ku Klux Klan rally that was to take place. The initiative earned him and Artists Against Racism a Spirit of Justice Award from the United Nations Human Rights Commission, and Cherniak enlisted Poulson as her group's U.S. coordinator.

Although Cherniak is delighted with all the awards and media coverage, she regards the attention largely as a means to enhance the credibility of Artists Against Racism among those who believe "it's so much more we could do if we had the money," she says. "I would like Artists Against Racism to have the reach of Amnesty International. I never feel that I've done enough." — Sherry Gordon

Lisa Cherniak
Founder, Artists Against Racism

LIKE MANY VISITORS TO NEW YORK CITY, Lisa Cherniak was having trouble getting a taxi early one evening last December. The petite 38-year-old Toronto woman was going to the United Nations for a gala dinner sponsored by Friends of the United Nations, a non-governmental organization "dedicated to increasing awareness of the United Nations' activities." The organization was presenting its 2001 Global Tolerance Awards, and as one of the recipients, Cherniak didn't want to be late. She finally gave up on the idea of getting a cab and hopped a ride on a bicycle with a man wearing a Santa Claus suit, arriving in time to join the pop diva Alanis Morissette and the other honorees.

Her unusual arrival reflected the resourcefulness and pluck that Cherniak has drawn on repeatedly over the past decade as founder and executive director of Artists Against Racism, a non-governmental organization that mobilizes musicians, authors and artists to serve as role models in promoting tolerance among young people.

Artists Against Racism's aim is to convince young people that racism is ignorant and "uncool," depriving racist groups of potential members.

Initially, Cherniak focused on Canada and managed to have stickers posted (with the names of supportive artists displayed in every public school as well as in public libraries and YMCA's). In 1996, she went global, using "her" artists in public service announcements on radio and television, publishing magazine and billboard ads with the artists' photos, and ensuring that the Artists Against Racism logo went on all CDs produced by member artists.

More than 100 leading Canadian and American artists, including Dan Aykroyd (left), have joined the campaign.
Canine Heroes

In a typical year, avalanches claim the lives of 12 people in Canada. However, some highly trained rescue dogs and their dedicated handlers are offering a better chance of survival to avalanche victims.

BY BRIAN PRESTON

"If you ever want to know what it feels like to be caught in an avalanche, here's your chance," Roy Fawcett tells me. Fawcett was an RCMP officer for 33 years, 17 of them as a handler of police dogs and six more as police dog supervisor for the RCMP in British Columbia. Now retired, he's a volunteer dog trainer this week, overseeing the beginner dog teams at the winter training session of the Canadian Avalanche Rescue Dog Association (CARDA).

While the intermediate and advanced teams go off to greater challenges, a special terrain has been prepared for Fawcett and his group of beginners on a snowy slope halfway up a mountain near Golden, B.C. Here, dog handlers and volunteers will become "quarry" buried in snow on the hillside.

Caves dug out of the snow provide reasonable comfort for the quarry, but on this day there isn't enough snow in which to build caves. "We're going to have to bury you in trenches dug into the ground and then cover you up with snow instead," says Fawcett in the no-nonsense voice of a career cop. "This is no time to be macho. If you're claustrophobic, speak up now. We don't need anyone going into panic mode." We breathe in air from a space made by a hand kept near the face, and there's comfort of a sort in the cool blue light that penetrates the snow. But you wouldn't have to be much deeper for terror to take hold. In a real avalanche, the snow often becomes as hard as cement and casts its victim into total darkness. A person can become disoriented, not certain which way is up. (In that case, experts suggest the "shovel test" — let spit run out of your mouth and judge by its flow which way is down.)

If you're lucky enough to survive the initial impact of an avalanche, your chances of living buried under the snow are only 50-50 after 20 minutes. Twelve people die in avalanches in Canada in a typical year. In Europe, with its denser population (and permanent villages that often nestle in the very shadow of threatening peaks), about 140 people are killed by avalanches each year. Rescue dogs (there are currently about 1,200 certified teams) have been used for decades there and have kept that number from being higher. Here in Canada, avalanche rescue dogs are a relatively new phenomenon. There are now 34 validated teams in 20 communities in Western Canada.

CARDA's roots reach back to 1977, when Bruce Watt, a member of the ski patrol at British Columbia's Whistler ski resort, was caught in an avalanche after being some charges to trigger a controlled slide. It appeared that the charges had been unsuc-
In the area of obedience. "He's too young for strict obedience training," explains Lewko. "At 14 months, if you get too serious about obedience, you take the drive for the search out. But I'll work on obedience this year, and I think he'll be ready by next winter."

At midweek, I leave the beginner to watch a quantity of older dogs undergo the CARDA validation process, which is required of all avalanche rescue dogs yearly. The validated are Rod Mercer, an RCMP inspector, and Tim Boal, who is retired from the force. "Obviously, we can't match the stress of a real avalanche rescue, but we do try to put stress on the handlers," says Boal. "They need to be able to work under stress. This is a serious test and simply taking it is stressful. Not everyone passes." Two teams today were in Roy Fawcett's beginner group a year ago and are attempting to be validated for the first time. One is Rod Frechette of Courtenay, B.C., and his dog, Yuko, who is one-quarter malamute and three-quarters German shepherd. Yuko got the malamute looks and the shepherd snorts. Yesterday at the validation site, a sparsely treed slope near the mountains at Kicking Horse Ski Resort, a number of objects like sweaters and backpacks were buried 25 centimeters deep in snow. Today, they are meant to represent humans buried by a recent avalanche (the item carries less scent than an actual body, but buried at this depth, they provide about the same amount of scent to a dog as a body buried typically by an avalanche). Frechette sits in, snow-throwing down with Yuko faithfully padding along between the backs of his skis. He is met by Mercer, who is playing the role of someone who witnessed the avalanche and is staggered by the experience. Time is of the essence, and Frechette asks pressing questions quickly, cutting off Mercer's rambling answers. Then, he and his dog begin their search. Yuko sweeps over the site in a deliberate side-to-side pattern, quickly locating and uncovering two widely spaced buried back-

All week the slope rings out with the words: "Good Dog! Great Dog! Way to go!"
The communication between dog and handler must be bang on.

Training a rescue dog largely means training the handler.

I have one clear memory of my journey to becoming a reader. I am sitting on a radiator in my second-grade classroom. I have a slim red book in my hands and open to the first page. There is a picture of a rosy-cheeked hen in an oven or walking down a street. I read the first words: “The little red hen lived in a little red house” (or something along those lines). I want to shout the book, as I have a number of times before, not realizing the least interest in a little red hen living in a little red house. But I know that in order to read the turquoise book (a real book, in my eyes, with smaller print, many more words and, I’m convinced, a much better story), I must get through the red book, as well as the green, purple and royal blue ones, discussing each with my teacher before progressing to the next.

So I don’t shout the book. Instead, I push myself to get through the unappealing story, absorbing at least enough to convince my teacher that I have actually read it. Boast by my success with the little red hen, I decide to attack the next book and the next and the next (these were obviously not great tomes). At the end of this reading, the teacher hands me the prized turquoise book and tells me I may take it home.

My pride knows no bounds as I sit in the car and start to read the story (about a boy chasing an errant parakeet through a town, as I recall) aloud to my mother. I wasn’t learning to read anymore, I could read.

I have many happy associations with books and reading. How I loved browsing in the bookmarks on an unattended afternoon in the winter holidays, looking for just the right book to buy with a gift certificate I’d been given for Christmas. And the satisfying experience of finishing the last page on Saturday afternoons when I was 11 and 12 and had a penchant for sleepy books about orphaned girls going to live with loving relatives. Just recalling the reading of certain books – Margaret Laurence’s The Diviners on a cross-Canada car journey, Somerset Maugham’s Of Human Bondage during the summer after first-year university, Carol Shields’s The Stone Diaries on a holiday in Scotland – can transport me to other times and places.

And I can’t ignore one of the great pleasures of parenthood – sharing books with children. There’s nothing quite like having a sleepy toddler snuggle up on your lap for a bedside bedtime story – Goodnight Moon, Mister Magnolia and Love You Forever in our house. Or the many journeys to and from a family cottage, which proved a great gift, providing, as a road trip diad, eight hours of reading time. It became tradition that I would choose a novel and read it aloud. In this way, my children, bothed and I shared such books as Anne of Green Gables, the Nancy series, The Hobbit, Eagle of the Ninth and Watership Down, and in doing so became a little closer.

Reading can have a transforming, and sometimes profound, effect on the lives of individuals, from the person who learns to read as an adult and finds a world of opportunities opened up to him, to the lonely housebound senior who finds companionship in books, to great thinkers whose ideas were spawned by the books of their youth.

In For the Love of Books, 115 writers discuss books that have been important to them. All Quiet on the Western Front was the seminal book for Canadian writer Mordecai Richler, who read the First World War story of a young German soldier as an adolescent in 1944, when he "devastfully wished every German on the face of the earth were extinguishing death." He was sick and an aunt had given him the book. He ignored it for two days, not wanting to read anything written by a German. Finally, boredom drove him to pick it up. "I never expected that a mere novel, a stranger’s tale, could actually be dangerous," Richler wrote, "creating such upheavals in my life, obliging me to question so many received ideas. About Germans. About my own monumental ignorance of the world."

As Dr Karen Smith, assistant professor in reading at the University of Manitoba, points out, "Simply taking part in society, especially a society that increasingly uses information and communication technology, depends on being able to read." Immeasurable studies, she tells me, testify to the benefits of reading. It has been shown to improve intellectual abilities, foster the imagination, help people understand themselves and others, and increase academic achievement and income level. Says Smith: "Imagine not being able to read.

I find satisfying that my employer, Imperial Oil, is also an advocate of reading and, as such, makes generous contributions aimed at encouraging children to read. Next year will see Imperial provide more than $50,000 to reading activities across the country, from visits to schools by authors to summer reading programs at libraries. And recently the company made a commitment to contribute $350,000 over the next four years to school boards in the Northwest Territories for the funding of school library resources. As K.C. Williams, a senior vice-president and director of Imperial, notes, "There is no more important gift we can give children to equip them for the future than literacy – it is the key to opening minds and opening doors of opportunity." – Smith Landry