

YURA Newsletter



A newsletter for members of the York University Retirees' Association (YURA)
Fall 2025 **No. 72**

YURA is a member of CURAC/ARUCC, the federation of the College and University Retiree Associations of Canada/Associations de retraités dans les universités et collèges du Canada

YURA is also a member of the international organization AROHE, the Association of Retiree Organizations in Higher Education

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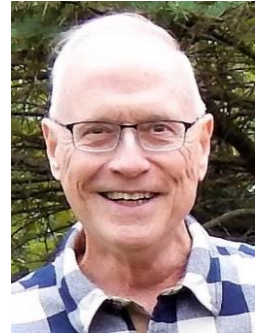
YURA Executive

York University Retirees' Association

Message from the YURA Co-Presidents



Once again, September has arrived, bringing refreshingly cooler days -- a welcome change after this summer's hot and humid weather. We hope that for YURA members, the summer offered a variety of joys: time to relax, the opportunity to be with family and friends, and the excitement that comes with travel and the discovery of new places and novel experiences. For many of us, with the



arrival of September comes the sense of a fresh start as another academic year begins. In retirement, the typical chaos of the first week of September has lessened, but we hope to retain the energy and optimism that the “new academic year” has signaled for us, for so many years of our working lives.

YURA is resuming its activities after the summer break; our office in the Lorna Marsden Honour Court reopened on September 9th and will be open every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. We express our deep thanks to our office volunteers, and we invite YURA members to drop by the office when they are on campus.

Our popular online YURA café has resumed, with its September 9th session devoted to a discussion of the return-to-the-office policies currently being implemented by various companies and government offices. The discussion provided an opportunity to think about the motivation of employers who seek to more fully engage their work teams and create connections of trust. At the same time, we noted the reluctance of employees, given that office spaces in many cases have become less congenial, and that much time is spent, and considerable stress incurred, with commuting in the GTA. We had an exchange of nuanced ideas, resulting in a thoughtful exploration of the topic—a true discussion. The dates of upcoming café sessions are October 14, November 11 and December 9. At one of those sessions, we will share the results of our short survey of YURA members and conduct a collective brainstorming exercise about how best to make our 40th anniversary gathering in 2026 a meaningful and joyful celebration and a community-building event for our members.

There are three important dates in October and November that we hope have found their way onto your calendars. The first is **Tuesday October 7th at 1:00 p.m.** when our members will engage in our annual YURA Challenge Walk on the Keele campus

(rain date is Thursday Oct 9th). Our fundraising team is very ably led by Sheila Forshaw and Debbie Hansen whom we thank for their energy, commitment and leadership. Our project this year is to support York students through the purchase of study pods for the campus libraries. There are numerous ways to participate and to show your support. Please join us for all or part of the 5 km walk following a route that takes us past some of York's impressive public artwork. The walk is done at a leisurely pace, and participants have ample opportunity to chat with other YURA members. At the conclusion of the walk, we gather for refreshments and socializing at the YURA office. If you are unable to join us for the walk, please consider enhancing YURA's impressive legacy of "giving back", by making a donation in support of this cause. More details about the YURA challenge are found below in this newsletter, and instructions on how to donate are also found on the YURA website at <https://www.yorku.ca/yura/events-and-programs/the-yura-challenge-2025/> .

A second important date is **Tuesday November 4th, 2025 from 2:00 to 3:30 p.m.** for a reception for retirees, to be held on campus. This event is being jointly planned by YURA and the Office of the Vice-President, Division of Equity, People and Culture. At this reception, new retirees will be honoured, and YURA members will be invited to share their thoughts on retirement and to connect socially with other retirees. Detailed planning for this event is underway; we will soon share details of the venue and how to register via a listserv message to our members. YURA is very pleased to be collaborating on this event; it represents an opportunity for YURA to be more visible, and to reach out directly to new retirees by congratulating them and by welcoming them to the joys and challenges of retirement.

The third date to note is that of **Friday November 21st at 10:00 a.m.** when our Annual General Meeting will take place online. Our guest speaker is Dr. Christine O'Kelly, of Dublin City University in Ireland. She is the Co-ordinator of the Age Friendly University Global Network, and her talk will focus on "Positive Ageing, Intergenerational Solidarity, and the Role of Higher Education." We anticipate that her talk will be timely and thought-provoking, especially given that York University is applying for designation as an "age-friendly university" --- see the Ten Principles of an Age-Friendly University at <https://www.afugn.org/principles> . The application process is being led by the York University Centre for Aging Research and Education, with the full support of YURA.

Finally, as mentioned above, planning for in-person events for 2026, our anniversary year, has begun. Our focus will be on having YURA members come together in fun and friendship, to renew connections, to celebrate the past and present, and to

explore our future as an association of retirees. We are deeply grateful to the many members who responded to our brief survey and who made suggestions for making our anniversary year a truly special time. Our 40th anniversary planning group will be reaching out to all those who expressed interest in serving on a retrospective panel and in assisting with planning our reception/luncheon to be held in late May/early June 2026. It will be exciting and rewarding to prepare a historical perspective of YURA, with a timeline and photos. We are proud of the many ways that YURA continues to support the University and its students, and we look forward to sharing our accomplishments and to envisioning our future.

We are absolutely delighted that many YURA members have offered to write reminiscences of their time at York. Our 40th anniversary planning group will be reaching out to all of you who indicated your willingness to write such reflections. We hope that many of you will submit your reflections both for a collection of memories, and for the YURA newsletter. This would be an excellent way to build momentum and to generate interest in our anniversary celebrations. As you know, YURA continues to publish a quarterly newsletter, which is distributed to members by e-mail. YURA encourages all of you, its members, to capture in writing memories of your time at York. Please send your thoughts/reminiscences to yura@yorku.ca specifying that your message is for the Newsletter Editors, Steve Glassman and Richard Weisman.

The coming months and the coming year (2025-2026) promise to be very busy ones for YURA. It is a very propitious time to be a YURA member, and we encourage all who have yet to renew their membership to do so. Our annual membership fee remains a modest \$25. Full instructions can be found at the following link on the YURA website: <https://www.yorku.ca/yura/membership/membership-renewal/>.

We take this opportunity also to remind YURA members of the opportunity to participate as research subjects in the many projects underway at York. There is an abundance of research that focuses on seniors and aging. This is one of the most important ways that you can support research at York, engage with doctoral students and their professors, and at the same time, contribute to a deeper understanding of the questions, concerns and issues that affect all seniors and retirees. Information about various projects for which participants are being sought is found on the main page of the YURA website at <https://www.yorku.ca/yura/>. Simply scroll down the landing page to the section “Retirees Sought for Research Studies at York University.”

We wish all our members an enjoyable autumn season, we look forward to seeing you at our upcoming events, and we encourage you to join in the preparations for our anniversary celebrations.

Diane Beelen Woody and Steve Dranitsaris

ARFL and YURA: York's two Retiree Associations

Fred Fletcher

Like many university retiree communities across Canada, York has two retiree associations. For YURA members, ARFL – the Association of Retired Faculty and Librarians - is the “other” one. While YURA encompasses all York University retirees, ARFL represents former members of the YUFA bargaining unit. As retiree associations, YURA and ARFL share three important priorities:

- To represent to the administration the interests and concerns of York's retirees
- To preserve and enhance a sense of community among York's retirees
- To assist retirees in continuing to contribute to York as an institution

Not surprisingly, therefore, both institutions bring in speakers, contribute to scholarships, and volunteer in a variety of capacities. ARFL, for example, supports the Lee Lorch Memorial Scholarship for Indigenous students. Last year, ARFL endowed a Bursary for students faced with a family emergency that might prevent them from continuing their studies.

In the context of these common goals, the executives of both organizations are in regular communication, assisted by the fact that each executive committee appoints an ex officio non-voting member to the other committee

Of course, the level of attention given to the three priorities differs. For example, ARFL's mandate is to represent the interests of retirees with the YUFA executive and, where appropriate, to the administration. Much attention is devoted to preparing for collective bargaining and dealing with issues around pensions and benefits. On the other hand, YURA devotes considerably more effort to various forms of community-building, organizing outings and other activities. These activities are also important to ARFL members. The two associations regularly co-sponsor presentations on topics of practical interest to retirees.

The ARFL priority is to protect and expand post-retirement benefits for YUFA retirees. The ARFL President is an ex officio member of the YUFA executive. ARFL has had some success in this respect in recent bargaining cycles and further advances may result from ongoing negotiations. Recent examples of improved benefits include significant improvements in dental coverage, increased reimbursements for prescription drugs, some financial support for hearing aids, and a Health Savings Account.

ARFL and YURA are members of the College and University Retiree Associations of Canada (CURAC) and are eligible for the various benefits provided by CURAC's affinity partners. Check the website (curac.ca) for details.

The 2025 ARFL AGM will be held in October or November and is expected to feature a speaker on a topic of interest to university retirees. The association also holds a General Membership Meeting in the spring, which features an update on ARFL activities and a speaker. This year, the speaker was Dr. Sheila Embleton, who discussed her experience as Interim President of Laurentian University.

ARFL provides its members with email updates on pension and benefits issues, two newsletters (spring and fall), and assistance with problems with pensions and benefits. The Executive Committee surveys members to identify retiree priorities. As part of the collective bargaining process. Currently, the executive is working on updating its website (<https://yuarfl.wordpress.com>).

Many members of ARFL are also members of YURA. Given the reasonable annual dues for each (\$25), the executive of ARFL strongly recommends that all eligible York retirees join both. In both cases, membership strength is an important element in their capacity to influence decisions relevant for retirees.

Fred Fletcher (ffletch@yorku.ca) is the ARFL representative on the YURA Executive Committee.

Virginia Rock- memoir excerpts

Preface

When I retired at the end of 2013, I offered to help Virginia Rock write her memoir. Virginia had been the Master of Stong, my undergraduate college, and she was my first boss when the College hired me on full-time staff, just as I was completing my undergraduate studies in 1973.

Over all of the years that I remained friends with Virginia, she talked at length about the memoir that she absolutely had to find time to write; but it had never happened. Anyone who knew Virginia, is aware that she was constantly drawn into various things -- mostly to help colleagues, students, former students, friends and even people she scarcely knew. Virginia was 90 years old when I retired, so I insisted that we schedule times to sit down and start work on her memoir. For the next 18 months and I can't remember how many sessions, we focused on at least writing the chapter of her life that was most meaningful to her and one that I could fairly readily assist with: The Recollections of the Founding Master of Stong College.

When we commenced work, Virginia was already dealing with respiratory and mobility problems. By the fall of 2015, she was hospitalized. She passed away that November.

When reading, please bear in mind that this recollection was written during 2014-2015, now a decade ago.

Steve Dranitsaris

Recollections: The Naming of a College

Virginia Rock

I was offered the position of Master of Stong probably by Dennis Healy (who was the Vice-President Academic at York in 1969) and it came by way of a written communication, although I'm not certain; when I was offered, I was told they had asked two other people already – two men. When I thought about it I responded impulsively that I didn't want to be at the end of the line and, besides, I was much involved and challenged by my teaching (I had come to a university just beginning to build a new campus only four years earlier), so I said "no". Afterwards, as I was passing (my English department colleague) Michael Collie's office with an open door, I stopped to tell him that I had been asked to be Master of York's fifth college and had turned it down. He said, "think more about it," suggesting that I re-consider the opportunity. At the time, there was no college building, no college identity, no name: it occurred to me that perhaps I could have some influence in determining the types of features that might be included in a new building. I remember thinking that, adjacent to a large student common room, there should be an art gallery and a theatre, rather than classrooms or rooms for other purposes.

When I came to York in 1965, I was a Fellow of Founders College (the only college then); I subsequently became a Fellow of Winters. My impression of a college was that it was a very social place with opportunity for getting to know people, having wonderful conversations about a great number of subjects. I knew that a Master had considerable



responsibility for making the college function and my sense was that it was all well underway because colleges were already functioning. For College E, I would have to find that path. As for specific things that Masters did, I didn't really know. I did know that relating to students and being with students was foremost, at least in my mind.

We were starting from the bottom of the earth, from the roots. I still have the vision of four enthusiastic students who, several months later, entered the construction site and climbed down into the hole which was for the college building foundation and they sat down where they thought the student common room would be located and dealt out a hand of bridge. I became excited by the prospect of creating something new.

Once I accepted the position, they had to find an office for the College and for the staff who were to be hired. Our college administrative offices were housed in the Temporary Office Building. A large room on the 1st floor north wing of the newly constructed (Murray G. Ross) Humanities & Social Science Building was designated as the student common room and adjacent rooms were provided to serve as a games room, coffee shop and student office. The rooms were set up with standard University lounge and office furniture and snooker and ping-pong tables.

The coffee shop was set up with about 6 or 7 round tables with chairs and decorated by a number of the early students led by Norm Stoeckl who managed it during that first year. The coffee shop was dark with black lights and neon-coloured wall posters (that glowed in the black light), but the coffee was always good and the cream filled chocolate glazed donuts were hugely popular with the students.

Our college was designated as College E, because we were the fifth college to be established at York. Professor Michael Herren joined me as the Senior Tutor and Colin MacAndrews as Executive Liaison Officer in the running of the college. John Bosley and Gordon Albright surfaced during the first year orientation in 1969 and provided helpful support through the next couple of years.

Originally from California where he received his undergraduate degree from Claremont Men's College, Michael Herren came to York in 1967 after completing medieval studies and doctoral studies in the classics at the UofT. He brought a tremendous cultural perspective and level of intellectualism I so dearly hoped to embed in the fibre of the college. Later in his career, Michael would become one of York's foremost scholars in the humanities, having the title Distinguished Research Professor bestowed, also being named a member of the Royal Society of Canada, an honorary member of the Royal Irish Academy, a Fellow of the Medieval Academy of America, and the holder of the Konrad Adenauer Research Prize for the Humanities.

Colin MacAndrews, a graduate of Cambridge University and MIT and a former employee of the British Council in the Middle and Far East, was a lecturer in Environmental Studies and brought an international perspective to the College and our students; he was a nationally ranked squash player, mixed very well with the students, and served as curator of the Stong College Art Gallery once the college building was completed. He left York in 1971 to work for the Washington Post as a foreign correspondent – he would proceed to serve in several academic positions in universities in southeast Asia, author twelve books, and emerge as a worldwide consultant on international development.

As a grad student in environmental studies, John Bosley was regarded as a BMOC (Big Man on Campus) and his rock and roll band became the regular entertainment at the Green Bush Inn, the campus' weekly pub prior to 1971. After York, John entered business and eventually landed in federal politics, as MP for Don Valley West from 1979 to 1984 and again from 1988 to 1993. From 1984 to 1986 he served as Speaker of the House in the federal legislature. Since 1993, he has served as advisor on institutional development to parliaments primarily in sub-Saharan Africa.

Gord Albright, a young academic who lectured in mathematics at Atkinson College, surfaced as an important contributor; a regular in the College E common room, he was highly regarded by the College E students; was permitted to play as the goaltender for our inter-college hockey team in its first two seasons; and served as the College's residence tutor in our temporary residence on the 9th, 10th and 11th floors of Graduate Residence #2 in 1970-71. Gord would become a tenure stream professor at York where he taught for his entire career. He remained an active Stong Fellow for many years.

Administrative support for the college was put in place early in the summer of 1969 and Ruth Allan was hired as my administrative secretary. Ruth was a solid support who provided a calming influence when stressful situations emerged. She was lightning fast on the keyboard and could accurately churn out the lengthy, detailed letters I wrote. She served as my secretary for the length of my term and, in the years that followed, became the confidential secretary to the University President (both to Ian Macdonald and Harry Arthurs).

By the Fall of 1969, Elizabeth Radford had joined the college leadership group as administrative assistant and Tillie Dale as Tutorial Secretary. Liz had been the administrative assistant to the University's Director of Personnel and she brought a high level of energy, cheerfulness and efficiency to the College administration. Liz had outstanding interpersonal and problem solving skills and, due largely to her youthful enthusiasm and willingness to help and even socialize, became very popular with the students. (Liz did leave the College in 1973 to pursue marriage, family and later a career in publishing and advertising.)

Not only did we have a new college to initiate, but 1969 was the first year that the undergraduate colleges were asked to mount college tutorials as part of the general education curriculum. The other four colleges had already found instructors for their college tutorial offerings from among the University faculty. What would poor College E, the late entry, do? The generous offer came from those four colleges that our students might link to their tutorials. But Michael and I would have none of that and decided that we might ask professionals from a variety of fields outside the University to teach tutorials in College E. It was a large task to mount the tutorial offerings with limited lead time and, thankfully, Michael welcomed the challenge.

Focus in my first year of the Mastership was on bringing together the various aspects of the college – the college tutorial program (in its first year), scrutinizing and making choices (where possible) in the plans for the College E building, mostly concerned about the relationship with students. Thankfully, Liz was there to look after administrative matters and Michael to lead the tutorial program. Our college building was to be designed and constructed in time for opening in fall 1970 – year two of the College. Construction of a connecting student residence, a 14-storey tower structure, was scheduled for a fall 1971 occupancy – year three of the College.

University administrators generally were helpful in providing guidance. I recollect that John Armour, the Director of Physical Plant, personally assisted in the furnishings for our college building, specifically for my office, the senior common room and the student common room.

I wanted the college to be a community of equals. I wanted to have Fellows and faculty knowing the students and students knowing them; meeting together in both social and cultural activities and at sports events. Rather than the conventional student council with limited student participation, I wanted the college to operate with open general meetings, fashioned somewhat on the model of the old American town hall meeting, where any student or other member of the college could have their say and could choose to be active or even more involved, in leadership roles. I worried about whether people would find time or have the inclination to meet this vision, but I continued to believe in it.

The Human Connection, a term which emerged many years later, was in fact much of the basis of my vision for the college.

In that initial year of College E, most students were newly arrived, first-year undergraduates, placed in a newly created college. There were a number of upper-year students from other colleges who elected to transfer to College E to be part of creating something new. Among them were Phil Cooke, Tony DiTosto, Tom Lyons, Rosemary King, Bruce Clark and Liz Mitchell. They emerged as the student leaders and, with the College staff, were able to foster much excitement among the student membership in

forging the “new frontier.” It may also have had much to do with the “participatory democracy” model, in which committees and meetings were open and any community member could have a say, lead or assist with an initiative, and create a stake for her/himself. It was always my hope that Fellows would attend the general meetings to have their say about issues and the direction that the students and the college more generally might take.

Among highlights of that first year was the orientation with an overnight sleepover in a large tent pitched on a vacant field, since our temporary student spaces were not quite completed; a dance on a Toronto harbour ferry boat; a staging of Molly Bloom’s closing monolog (from James Joyce’s *Ulysses*) directed by Stong fellow, Harry Pollock; and a campus scavenger hunt designed to help students find their way around. Later that year, a reading and talk by American political activist poet Alan Ginsberg was held in our temporary student common room in the Ross Building (a space which later became the location of the Art Gallery of York University); I’m not certain how it happened that the Alan Ginsberg event was in the College E common room; it may simply have been a logical large central campus place for students to gather informally; but it was fortuitous for a college that was becoming a home for innovation and forging new frontier.

Late in that first year (winter 1970), I initiated a process to come up with a permanent name for the College to recommend to the University administration. I structured a committee with representatives of the Fellows, the students and University administrators. From a list of more than a dozen names that had been suggested, we narrowed it down to a handful and then polled the College membership for their input. There was much support for keeping the name, College E, because of the excitement and enthusiasm that had built during that first year. “E” could stand for “Excellence”, “Enthusiasm”, “Excitement” or even “E-College-E”. In the end, the committee decided that the University was unlikely to allow the College E name to remain. Among the final choices were Emily Carr, Norman Bethune, Diamond Jenness and Stong, the name of the pioneer family which, for 150 years, farmed the land on which the University campus has been built.

I heard afterwards that our selection of a name was not warmly received, that the University administration was disappointed that we had decided not to advance a name that might yield a benefaction.

Excerpt from Virginia Rock's Recollections as Founding Master of Stong College



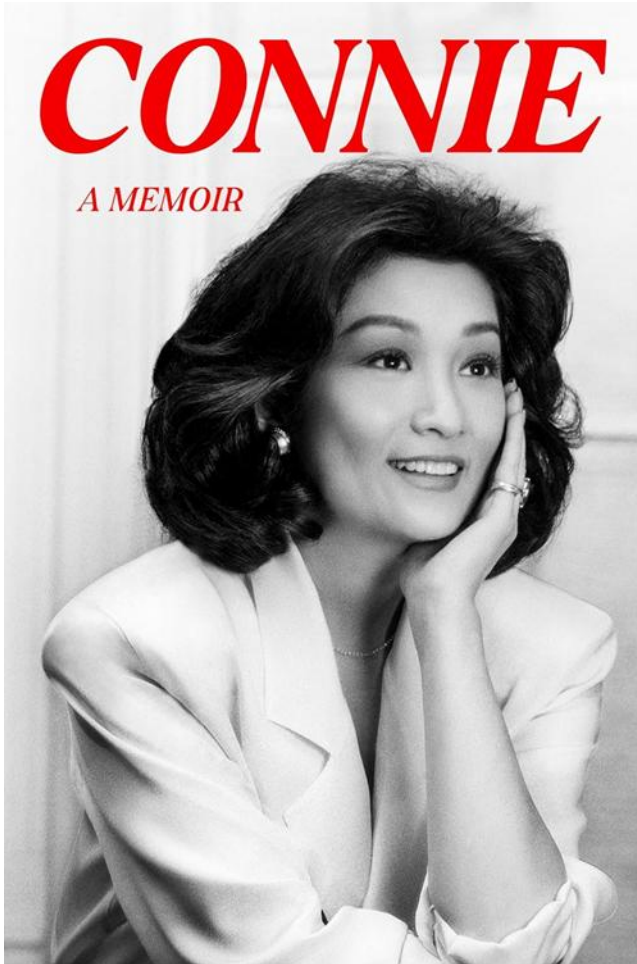
As the first woman Master of a college at York (and I believe at any other university in Canada) I was always hopeful that I was contributing to a shift from what had been the traditional place of the woman in North American society. There were a couple of amusing moments from when people were getting adjusted to the fact that I was cast in the position of a leader. The first was shortly after my appointment when what I should be called was being discussed. There were some who thought “Mistress” would be appropriate (perhaps looking back to British practice) and others who thought it might be amusing to introduce me as “my mistress”, but when I was asked I said, “no question about it; I am a Master since I am in the position of other Masters.”

Now being a Master, I presented a bit of a conundrum about how to fit me into the traditional after-dinner distribution of cigars. There was an important dinner meeting at an established “gentlemen’s club” in downtown Toronto attended by all of the Deans, Masters and senior administrators, who were all men. The poor waiter didn’t know what to do when he attempted to follow traditional practice. First, he offered the box of cigars to me and then, thinking better of it, drew it back. I turned around and said, “I will have one of those!” Also, I suspect I may have made many a candidate for the Academic Advisor or Residence Tutor positions uneasy when I would always ask them if they would have any problem working with a woman.

Book Review *Connie: A Memoir*

Anne-Marie Ambert

Connie: A Memoir Connie Chung. New York, Hackettstown Book Group. 2024



Many of us may remember Connie Chung who, in 1993, became the co-anchor of CBS Evening News with Dan Rather. This position was what Connie had long dreamt of and worked so hard for two decades as a news person and anchor to achieve. Unfortunately, Dan Rather saw her as a competitor and eventually forced CBS to fire her.

Connie was born in 1946 in Washington DC, a year after her parents arrived from China with her four older siblings. The Chung family had fled China in the most haphazard, suspenseful, and intriguing way.

Connie describes her childhood and then her adulthood involved in the news in a large variety of positions. She is an excellent and vivid writer and includes a great deal of personal as well as professional details.

She suffered from a double form of discrimination, both because she was Asian and because she was a woman at a time when neither social categories were rewarded in terms of achievement. I do not want to give away some of the surprising elements of her life and I will simply conclude by saying that this is a most interesting book to read.

Sleep and Life Expectancy

Anne-Marie Ambert

People who regularly have nightmares are more likely to die young than those who are not plagued by bad dreams, researchers have found. In fact, experiencing frequent nightmares is a better predictor of early mortality than well-known risk factors such as poor diet, smoking and obesity.

The research was based on data gathered on more than 183,000 adults over 26 who, among many questions, had been asked about their sleep and then tracked for up to 19 years. When the results were analyzed, it turned out that the adults who had nightmares at least once a week were about three times more likely to have died prematurely--before the age of 70-- than those who were rarely or never troubled by them.

By looking at biological markers known as epigenetic clocks, the scientists from the Imperial College in London, also established that adults who suffered nightmares had experienced faster cellular aging than their peers. Analysis of studies involving children revealed that this was also the case for those who had nightmares.

One theory is that the release of the stress hormone cortisol during nightmares speeds up cell aging; another is that it is simply the impact of sleep being disrupted. However, more research is needed to establish a causal link: "nightmares can be associated with medical conditions that people experience as they get older."

The source of the above quoted text is the magazine from London called The Week, July 5, 2025. As its last sentence proposes it, it is possible that people who suffer from frequent nightmares also suffer from other conditions that were not included in the study. Also, I was wondering if there would be a positive link between having pleasant dreams and living longer!?

YURA Challenge 2025

SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS IN THE LIBRARIES AND SECURING YORK UNIVERSITY RETIREES' LEGACY

Every day, up to 10,000 students walk through the doors of York University Libraries, seeking quiet, focus, and a place to thrive. In a survey of more than 4,000 students, one request came through loud and clear:

“We need more quiet, private study spaces.”

That’s the message from thousands of York students—and YURA is answering the call with an innovative fund-raising cause over the next three years.

The **York University Retirees’ Association** and the **York University Libraries** are stepping up to provide quiet study pods: these are leading-edge, soundproof booths designed for focus, comfort, and connection, complete with privacy and built-in power access.

We can ensure that York students enjoy the same advantages as their peers at U of T and McGill, where study pods have already been introduced and are in high demand—**by supporting this innovative initiative in the Libraries, you can help make a lasting contribution to support York’s students.**

These pods are ideal for:

- Private study and deep focus
- Attending virtual classes or completing online or oral exams
- Job interviews and mentorship calls
- Supporting students with sensory stimulation concerns

This is where YURA’s legacy begins.

With your support, we can continue YURA’s decades-long tradition of giving back to the University and supporting student success.

OUR GOAL

Over each of the next three years, YURA aims to raise \$30,000 to fund the installation of two study pods per year in York University libraries. **Your support will make a real and lasting difference in students’ lives and will strengthen YURA’s role as a valued member of the York University community.**

HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT US

We invite you to join the YURA Challenge Team by participating in our 5 km walk on campus, by canvassing for donations, or by sponsoring our team of enthusiastic members.

Please join us. Leave a legacy and support student success.

JOIN OUR FUNDRAISING TEAM – Contact yura@yorku.ca or call 416.736.2100 x70664

CLICK HERE TO DONATE

OR CLICK HERE: [DONATE](#)

Do the Monster Mash

Steve Glassman

I was working in the lab, late one night

When my eyes beheld an eerie sight

For my monster from his slab, began to rise

And suddenly to my surprise

He did the mash, he did the monster mash

The monster mash, it was a graveyard smash

He did the mash, it caught on in a flash

He did the mash, he did the monster mash

To refresh your memories, “Monster Mash,” was released in 1962 by Bobby “Borris” Pickett and the Crypt Kickers. As we are approaching autumn, and Halloween, you will probably hear this tune on the radio.

I’ve been using this song as a memory aid. To my delight, I learned a new word and its meaning about a year ago. The word is *mast*, and the phenomenon of *masting* in plants. Yeah, to remember the word, I sing the Monster Mash and then in my head I substitute “mash” with “mast”.

I was walking in an older Toronto neighbourhood, and I noticed acorns littering a driveway. Looking down the driveway to the back of the property, it was entirely covered with acorns. As the driveway sloped towards the detached garage, I saw that the acorns were almost ankle deep. I noticed that fall that other oaks (*Quercus spp.*) also produced a bountiful harvest of acorns. This included the oaks lining York Lanes. (They are most likely Columnar oaks, *Quercus robur*) In other years, there seemed to be no acorns littering the sidewalk outside the Lanes, so it was noteworthy that there was a generous amount of acorns that same autumn.

As it happened, several years earlier (OK, it was pre-COVID to put a timeline on it) my child wanted to gather nuts from the Black Walnut tree (*Juglans nigra*). The hull of the fruit contains a dye that Layah wanted to use as a textile die. We knew of a row of Black Walnut trees growing near an abandoned farmhouse in Markham near the local high

school. Luck was with us; we filled our buckets in minutes- and now I know why- it was a mast year.



Harvesting Black Walnuts. My afternoon activity on the day of my retirement in 2019

So you get it: masting is the phenomenon where certain trees and other plants produce large crops intermittently, and low seed or fruit production in other years. There's more

to it than that. We cannot explain masting solely due to good weather for flowering and fruit development- especially over vast landscapes. And so, theories of plant communication, and even, gasp, plant intelligence theories are advanced to explain masting.

Masting demonstrates an ecological or evolutionary advantage. In mast years, the production of acorns overwhelms squirrels, deer, and rodents. They just can't eat all of the acorns. In normal years, these animals rely on other food sources. Their population levels are guided by regular, non-mast years' supply of food. When a mast year arrives, the abundance of seeds exceeds the consumption capacity of the local fauna, ensuring that a significant portion survives and germinates.



Plant communication: *You talkin' to me? You talkin' to me? You talkin' to me? "You talking to me?"*

The mechanics of so-called plant communication are through chemical signals released into the air, through roots and root systems associated fungi, and even electrochemical means. Stefano Mancuso, a Plant Neurobiologist at University of Florence, has a fairly recent book on the subject, intended for the general public, The Revolutionary Genius

of Plants: A New Understanding of Plant Intelligence and Behaviour, (Atria Books, 2017). He doesn't cover masting, but other phenomena, like this from the blurb at the back of his book: "A single rye plant can have a "connective nervous system" of over a million root apexes...They offer a model for non-hierarchical, diffused gathering and sharing of information that suggest what the Internet might look like in years to come."

So late night TV comics continue to rehash jokes about playing music to your houseplants and other bits about plant intelligence, at least on slow news days.

It looks like there is something to this, difficult as it is to investigate. Perhaps plant intelligence- PI, will be the next AI?

And now the funnies

presented by Vivienne Monty (with Steve Dranitsaris)



**WHENEVER I'M SAD,
YOU'RE THERE.
WHENEVER I HAVE PROBLEMS,
YOU'RE THERE.
WHENEVER LIFE CRAPS ON ME,
YOU'RE THERE.
LET'S FACE IT, YOU'RE BAD LUCK.**

SHARED ON I'M NOT RIGHT IN THE HEAD.COM

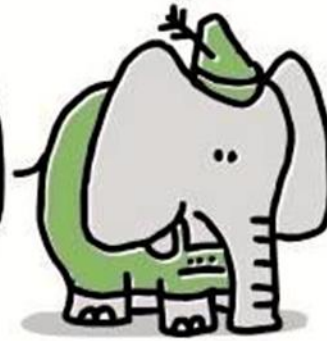
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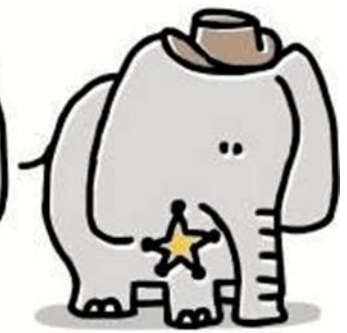
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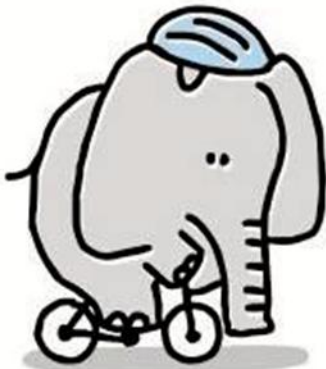
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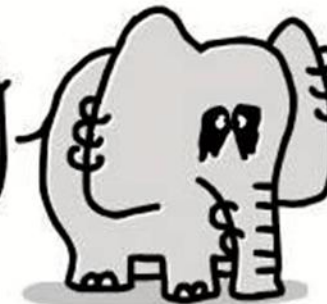
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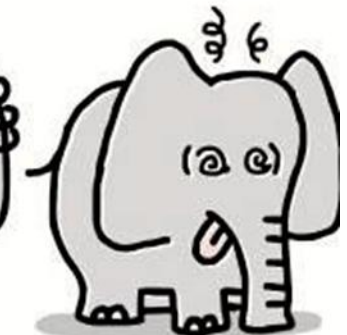
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Comic



Gothic



Dingbats

Just one more thing....

From the editors

We want your submissions! Letters, questions, reminiscences, thoughts about retirement, and so on. Remember the long-standing feature of YURA news- the “Life as it Was Back Then” series? Some of us submitted excerpts from memoirs, while other contributions were written exclusively for the YURA Newsletter. Well folks, we still need to know- what was life like back then?

This fall we have started to include excerpts from Virginia Rock’s unpublished memoir, to be continued in the next few newsletters. Steve Drantisaris assisted Professor Rock in its’ writing. The memoir itself will be preserved in the York archives. We hope you find this period of York’s history to be of interest, as well as Rock herself- She was a pioneer in Women’s Studies and equal rights at York.

New contact info for York’s Pension and Benefits office

YURA members should note that the Pension & Benefits section in the University Services Centre at the University has a new e-mail address and telephone number:

E-mail:

askusc@yorku.ca

Phone: 416.736.5212

The previous e-mail address, askpb@yorku.ca, will be phased out in the weeks ahead.

Tell us your York Story

As YURA plans for its 40th anniversary in 2026, we are seeking interesting or humorous stories about your working years at York University – whether it’s your recollection of the time you started at York, about an achievement, a particular work situation or an event. If you have been actively involved in YURA at some time during your retirement, perhaps there’s a story about your retiree involvement that you might share. We plan to publish several stories in each issue of the YURA Newsletter during our 40th anniversary year. Interested? If you need an inspiration- hows’ this: *tell us where you were in 1985*. Send a note to yura@yorku.ca or contact Steve Dranitsaris at sdrano@rogers.com.

For the benefit of members

There are many benefits and discounts available to us- check out [Membership Privileges | York University Retirees' Association](#) website.

Two examples to entice you to click the link and visit our website: One- 60% savings on lens upgrades if you need new spectacles. Two- 10% off on hearing aids.

Coming events

Friendly reminders. See the co-presidents' remarks about the YURA Challenge, October 7th (and donate, even if you don't want to walk with us) and the AGM on November 21st.

YURA Executive

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YURA Office Hours

Tuesday 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Wednesday 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Thursday 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

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Steve Glassman, Editor
Richard Weisman, Editor