"A social space"

"A meeting point"

"A refuge"

Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Park

Sara Mizannojehdehi


COTE-SAINT-ANTOINE
MARCIL
SHERBROOKE
CHALET
BAR-B-Q

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See the website here:
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MARCIL GIROUARD



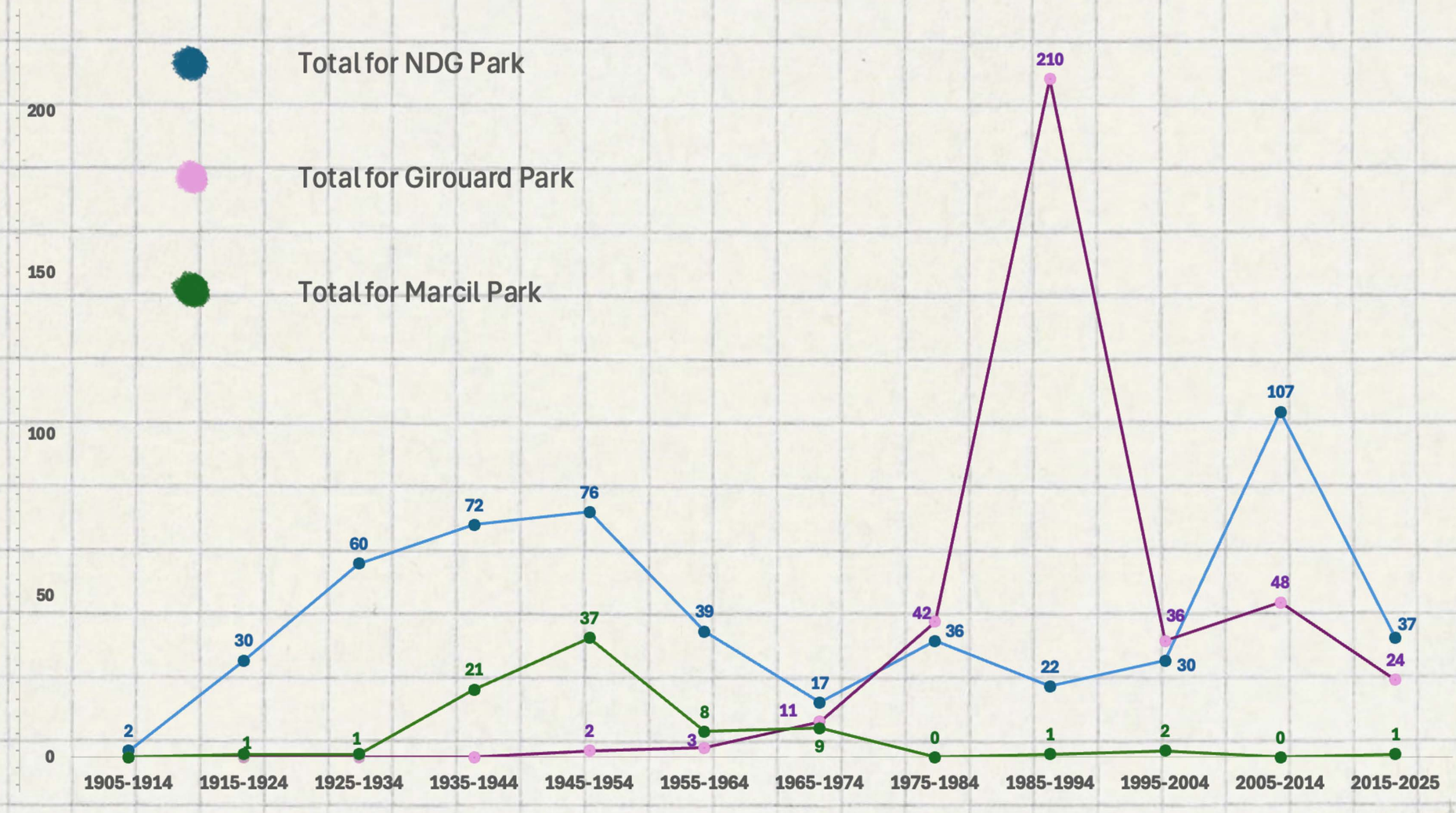
Introduction: What's in a park?

If you've been to Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (NDG), you've likely passed by its namesake park. The 8.74-acre trapezoidal greenspace between Sherbrooke St West, Girouard Ave, Cote-Saint-Antoine Ave, and Marcil Ave sits at the metaphorical heart of the Notre-Dame-de-Grâce quarter. It's near enough to transit, parking, and bike paths, making it accessible, yet far enough from the Décarie that the sound of traffic muffles when you move beyond the edges of the park.

Its most common names come from the streets surrounding it: currently, the name we most often hear is Girouard Park, but before that, many referred to it as Marcil Park.

In 1924, there was a proposal to change the name to "Park of Memories" for the Monument aux Braves. Although that never happened, the city renamed the southern end of the park, where the cenotaph stands, "Place de Vimy" for the 100th anniversary of its namesake battle.

Names the Montreal Gazette called Notre-Dame-Grâce (NDG) Park throughout the years



Data from ProQuest's historical Newspapers and Newspapers databases

Beyond official titles, word of mouth and an unsuccessful petition point to calling the northern end of the park Jackie Wallace Park after a renowned NDG coach.

Now, younger park dwellers, in particular skateboarders, know the area as G Park .

But what's in a name that we call a park? How did the urban park come to be in Montreal?

Compared to traditional town squares and European gardens, the urban park is a North American construct, only originating in the 19th century, says Silvano De la Llata, associate professor in Urban Planning and Design at Concordia University.



"Montreal is really like a laboratory to test what we call landscape architecture,"

he explains, highlighting Mount Royal Park as an early example of that. The father of landscape architecture and urban parks, Frederick Law Olmsted, designed this urban park, which opened in 1876.

Olmsted said that parks create an escape from the cityscape where visitors can develop an "enlarged sense of freedom" and feel at peace.

Research today backs him up. Findings from a 2022 Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) study highlights how parkgoers across Quebec reap a variety of benefits from urban parks. Those who visit parks often feel as though they are engaging in an act of self-care, emotionally recharging, and establishing a sense of community. The park's environment also allows them to care for others, like their children, neighbours and pets.

“One of the things that is singular about the park is that you are in a state of being away,” explains De la Llata. The professor, whom I met at NDG Park, points out a couple sitting on the grass together in conversation. “It (a park) has this certain feeling of (being) private in public.” One can share moments of closeness with those around them, despite being in a public space.



While NDG Park is a singular place, it has had many identities since 1908. It's where local organization Head & Hands hosted massive concerts called “ Sunday in the Park ” from 1970 to 2002. It's where Montreal’s Golden Chariot streetcar stopped on its route to explore the city. It's where tango and Zumba groups meet to dance and breakdancers gather on Wednesdays. It's where the dog park and play structure are never empty.

Throughout 127 years, the park has experienced subtle and abrupt transformations. Ask yourself if you've ever taken a stroll by the pond at the front of NDG Park. The question doesn't make sense because NDG Park doesn't have a pond, but in 1910, there was a possibility that it could have . Have you ever spun on the infamous merry-go-round? How many trees did the August 2017 microburst tear down? Why aren't there more sports facilities at the park? What was there before the dog park? The answers to these questions reveal a park that has transformed throughout its lifetime.

Still, there are parts of the park that remain practically unchanged. At the northern end of the park is the summer baseball diamond and winter skating rink. In the south is Place de Vimy. Irregular paths connect these areas to the central pavilion, where people often congregate to tango, listen to music, or just hang out.

To explore its sense of place, it's only fair to deconstruct Notre-Dame-de-Grâce's namesake park into these recognizable parts, which not only fulfil a function but hold time.



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Rendez-Vous in NDG

This is the first of two stories on music at the park. The second, looking at Sunday in the Park and MTL vs Racisme, is coming soon.

On the evening of October 4, 2024, my friend, Janyne, told me about a dance party at Notre-Dame-de-Grâce park. On a summer-like evening growing chillier every minute, we found ourselves in a crowd of all ages dancing in front of the pavilion. It was another night at the Rendez-Vous, an initiative that had transformed the quiet pavilion in the park into a bustling barbeque, bar and concert stage in the summer of 2024. It all started with Jérôme Glad, an associate at Belleville Placemaking and an NDG resident.

Revitalizing arts in NDG



“It’s truly and honestly a change to the social fabric in this quarter (NDG),” explains Glad regarding what has happened to NDG Park since Rendez-Vous.

Living near the park since 2017, Glad recalls litter scattered across the greenery and graffiti tags covering the pavilion. Often, he and his family would opt to go around the park rather than through it. Despite that, the park’s beauty stuck out to him since the day he moved here.

The park was a part of the dwindling community surrounding it, he explained. Since the pandemic, several storefronts have shuttered in the area, including Shaika Café, a cozy establishment known for its food, drinks, and arts scene.

“That was the place you could have poetry readings and music,” remembers Brendan Kelly, an NDG resident, Montreal Gazette columnist, and recreational DJ, “Shaika was like a real hangout. There was a real community.”



Kelly has experienced Sherbrooke Street West first-hand and has written about how the area has quieted down over the years. It was during the pandemic that he and Glad recognized the power of bringing the community together in the park. Glad proposed Rendez-Vous to the City of Montreal, and they accepted it. In 2024, the initiative took off.

Of 463 attendees polled in 2024, Glad said that most people have revisited Rendez-Vous 3 to 6 times. The atmosphere might be why. At a typical Rendez-Vous, children run around the crowds, forming friendships under the fairy lights, while their parents connect in conversations. Food and drinks flow from the pavilion as musicians of all genres play in front of a setting sun.

The element of music is what sparks the rest of the excitement at the pavilion. The beat of the drums, the electricity of the guitar, or on a night where there's a DJ, the rush when one's favourite song begins to play, fuel the dancefloor.

In 2024, musicians played at the park for 43 nights of shows. Every night, there were between three to four musicians playing, bringing the total number of artists to around 150 to 180, explained Glad.



"There are an enormous number of artists in the NDG quarter, but there aren't any venues. There are no real places for artists to share (their music)," says Glad.

One of these musicians was Kelly himself. His high-fidelity sets bring music from the 80s to the park.

On that first October evening when my friends and I danced on the cobblestone, Kelly played a set.

On the first night of Rendez-Vous in 2025, Kelly played again.

The first night of Rendez-Vous 2025

From a wooden deck-turned stage, he mixed together favourites from “Gimme! Gimme! Gimme! (A Man After Midnight)” to “My Sharona”.

“It’s got a very unique feel to it,” Kelly explains, “I’m part of the community, you know. People totally come up and talk to me, and they make requests.” At the show, I watched children and adults alike move to Kelly’s booth regularly, doing just that.





Throughout the night, it's hard to find Glad in one place. Sporting a Hawaiian shirt, he runs around the park, talking to attendees as well as community organizers and leaders from the past and present.

"Ultimately, it's a truly meeting point. " Glad says when describing the sense of place at the park. On a night like this one, it becomes obvious. Like a magnet, the pavilion drew in a crowd of all ages, dancing to the pumping beat.

As the sun set, the energy on the dance floor went up. Some songs would bring the crowd together in synchronized routines with moves that everyone seemed to know. On the sidelines sit large groups of families and friends sitting with their pets, holding beers and munching on hot dogs

"You sit on the terrace there (at the park) and you order a drink, alcoholic or not, and it's like the nicest terrace in the city," Kelly explains.

.





As we chat, a woman who attended Kelly's high-fidelity DJ sets comes up to us, telling us her name was Adriana and that she had moved here from the Plateau a few years ago.

For her, the one thing that was missing from NDG was its community events, and Rendez-Vous was one of the events that filled that gap. "NDG's becoming cool in a very quiet way," Adriana expressed.



A few weeks later, as I leave an evening at Rendez-Vous, my head pulsing from the music, it seems like within the confines of the park, NDG is becoming cool in a very loud way.

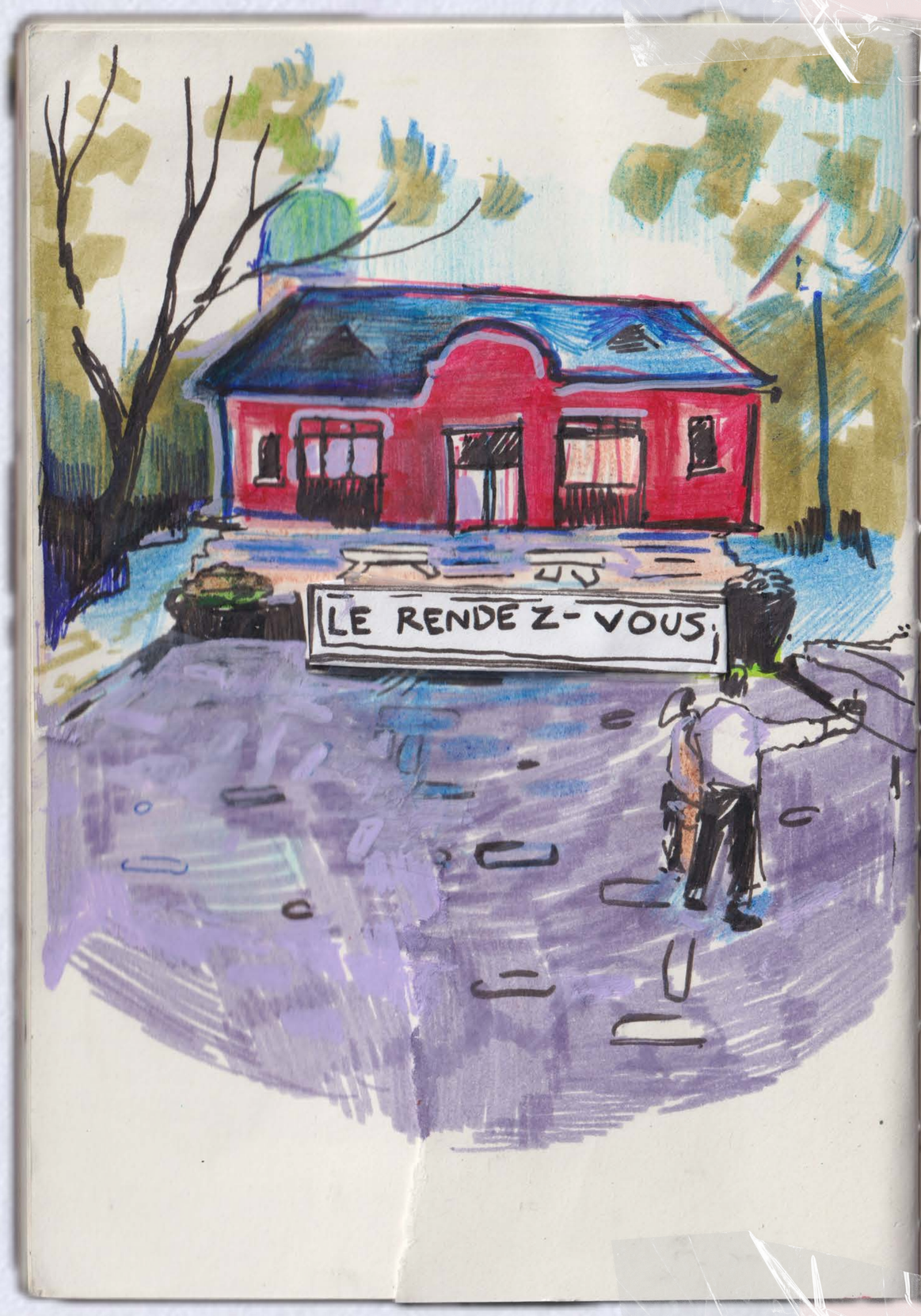




I met Silvano De la Llata on the first truly summer-like day of 2025 at NDG Park.

Our meeting point was a picnic table situated on the wooden deck in front of the park's central pavilion.

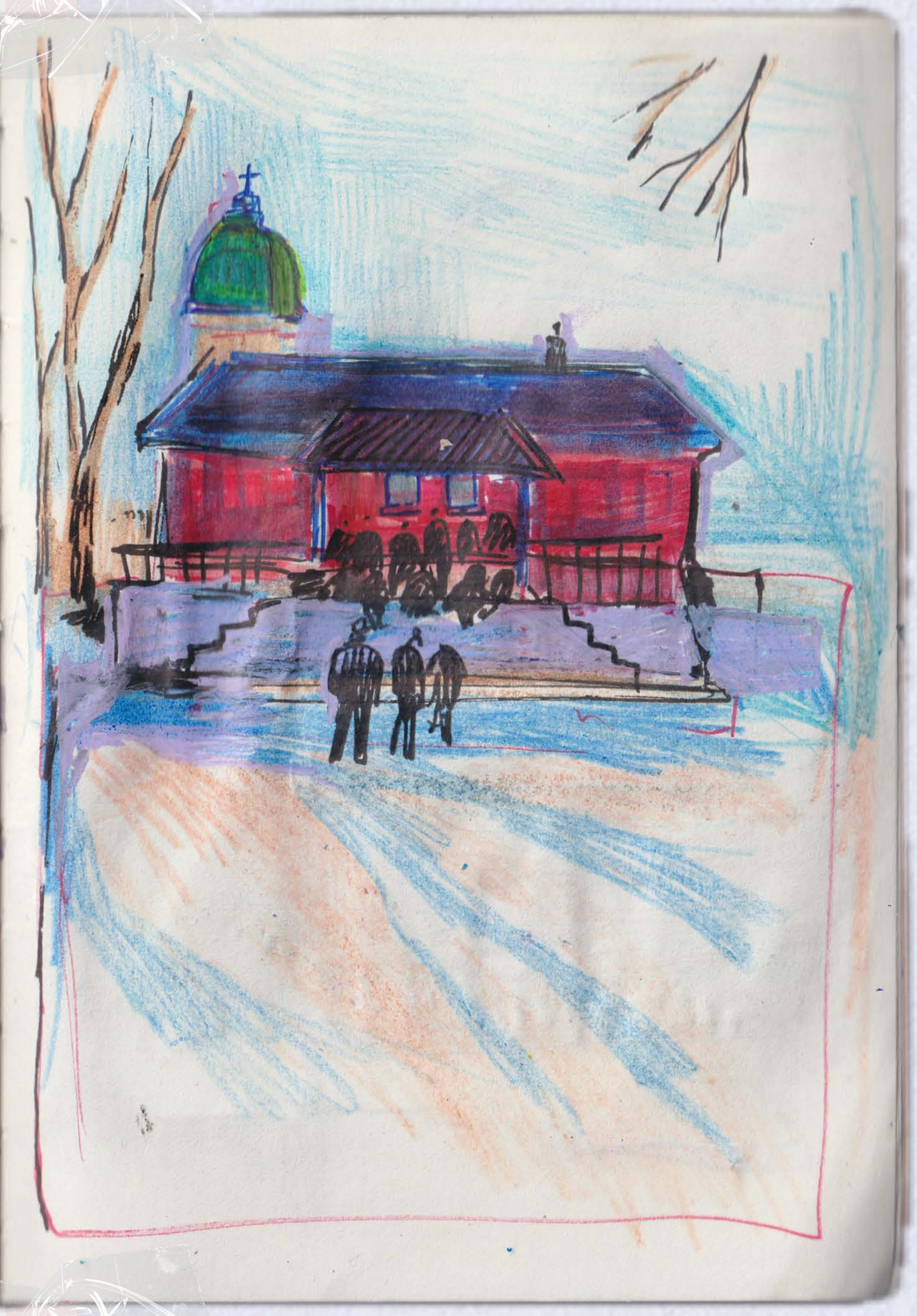
In 2016, the City of Montreal tasked the associate professor in Urban Planning and Design at Concordia University and his student team with redesigning the area in front of the NDG and Martin Luther King Park (then Kent) pavilions for Montreal's 375th anniversary. This space is called a placette, or a small square. The area became what is now called Place 375e at both parks.



One of the core values of this redesign was versatility, says De la Llata, and it became evident when he asked community members to weigh in on the design process through three days of participatory meetings on March 12 and 16, 2016, at the placette.

Designing the Placette

On a relatively warm day in a park surrounded by piles of snow, 30 or so community members and students met with De La Llata's team. Their conversations were dynamic, with the architectural team moving boxes around the park to determine where they could place new additions, such as a stage.

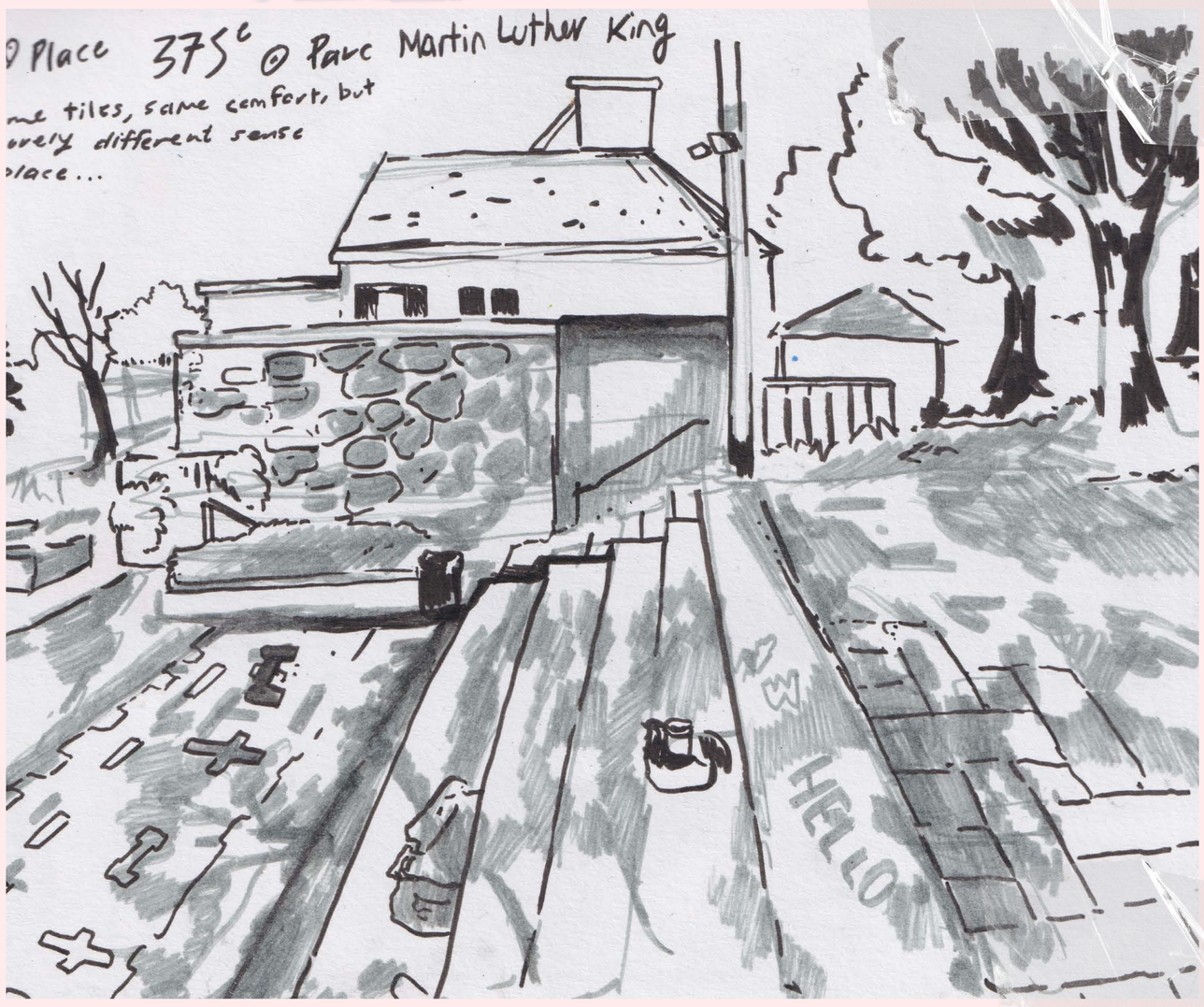


"The word stage made us stick with a construct of a stage," he explained. By doing so, it limited the role of eventgoers to spectators instead of active participants or actors. Instead, they settled on calling it a community platform, "(It's) not simplistic, but simple in its aesthetics in order to allow for flexibility, for versatility," he continued.

Once the city had De La Llata's plan, they executed it with around 80 per cent accuracy, which he says is a win for architects.

Although some of their ideas, like poles for art exhibits, did not come to life, De La Llata says that the designs for both parks ended up being similar. The most evident similarity I saw was the tiles and layout of the stairs.

Before and after its transformation, the placette has been where most people and organizations held their events. It is a testament to the nonconformity of NDG Park. The park is neither all about the music nor is it all about the sports. It's a mishmash where community members come together to partake in their activity of choice.





J.A Godin's NDG Park

Imagining a one-size-fits-all NDG Park is difficult, but it was a possibility early in its history.

Historian Walter Van Nuss has connected the creation of the park to when the town of NDG was branding itself as an attractive place to live by modernizing Sherbrooke Street. The corridor linking NDG to Montreal and Westmount could bring in more residents if it had access to public transit and a park for homeowners.

Records from the Gazette show that in 1907, the park was one of the town's most serious liabilities but also a good investment, being worth 47,000 dollars at the time. In 1907, the Village Council of NDG-Ouest purchased NDG and Trenholme Park for $107,820.

In 1910, debt led to the downfall of the town of NDG, leading to its annexation by the city of Montreal. In the process of revitalization, the city's parks superintendent, Émile Bernadet, asked architect Joseph Arthur Godin to propose a design for NDG Park. What Godin didn't know was that he wasn't the only person asked. Godin conferred with commissioners and came up with a design that he estimated would cost 94,000 dollars. Although, according to Godin's court records, the city initially seemed willing to move forward, they ultimately decided to follow with another plan that would keep the integrity of the land and cost 25,000. When they wouldn't compensate Godin for this work, he sued them. Years later, in 1917, the court dismissed his lawsuit.

Despite Godin's loss, it can be fun to imagine the NDG Park that never was. His most well-known work, L'Edicule Godin on Sherbrooke Street West and Saint-Laurent Boulevard, brought Art Nouveau to Montreal. His would-have-been NDG Park was extravagant, with a lake extending as a river through the park and an Art Nouveau-influenced chalet.







While Godin had a vision for beauty and conformity, his park would reduce the place we know as a concert venue, dance hall, playground, dog park, and sports field to one identity.

Side Story: M.Gardaix

The park plan the city opted to go with which cost, at most, 25,000 went to a man that only went by his last name Gardaix.

Finding a trace of Gardaix is difficult. In various Montreal newspapers from 1913, there are ads for the Pointe-Claire Tree Nursery run by a man named Constant Gardaix. The nursery's services include providing trees for parks.

Gardaix's tree planting goes beyond his nursery; in 1914, he signed a contract with the city of Maisonneuve to receive funding for his nursery services. In the same year, the city agreed to have Gardaix plant a nursery at Maisonneuve Park.

When I told De la Llata about the park's history, he told me that back then, gardeners and those who worked with plants often took the role of designing parks, making Gardaix a possible candidate for designing the park.

Regardless, without further context, there's no way to know if Constant Gardaix was the designer of NDG Park and the reason why it looks the way it does today.

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a Brief history of Monument aux Braves de NDG

On a somewhat rainy November 10, 2024, I stood amongst the trees at the front of Place Vimy as a crowd began to form closer to the Monument aux Braves. This was the day of NDG's annual Remembrance Day ceremony. Throughout the hour, Reverand Joel Coppieters from the Côte-des-Neiges Presbyterian Church spoke to the audience while the church's choral group sang. Beyond speeches, anyone who walked by could have heard bagpipes playing or cannons firing. Amongst the many people at the front of the cenotaph were members of the Royal Canadian Legion 24/106, cadets, politicians from across the borough, and Sergeant at Arms Della Robertson.

This ceremony is one of NDG's longest-standing traditions, dating back to the creation of the monument itself in 1919. According to the City of Montreal archives , the cenotaph, which stands tall in structure at the southern end of the park,



came into existence not directly because of the city of Montreal but due to efforts based at the NDG Curling and Bowling Club and by its president, Horace J Gagné.

According to the Gazette , Gagné and other members began fundraising in February of the same year through concerts, public subscriptions, and a tag day, in which people gathered donations for a cause and received a tag. The committee's participants ranged from pastors to bookstore owners to the president of the NDG Improvement League, an organization similar to what would be the community council now.

The committee seemed to be planning on placing fountains at the monument, receiving permits to build them, but they never did, explains Jeffrey Kastner, director of the NDG Historical Society. Although he believes that was because of a lack of funding, he suspects it was due to time as well. "It seemed to be the first monument in town," he expressed, "These guys were really eager to get it out there and get it out there fast."





Lucien Fernand Keroack, the Montreal-based architect who also designed the Administration Building at Montreal Botanical Garden, came up with the design for the monument, which ended up being built with white granite from Lac Megantic.
On May 24th, 1919, the monument was put into place by Sir Charles Fitzpatrick, the Lieutenant General of Quebec. In the same year on October 30th, King Edward, then known as the Prince of Wales, visited the monument on his tour of Montreal. In one of the most well-known stories of the park, the king came riding into the park with a parade, inaugurating the monument.

The Gazette pieces together his time at the park: According to their reportage, throughout his visit, he paid respects to every soldier who fought in the war. As he walked to the monument, surrounded on both sides by cadets and Boy Scouts, he immediately went over to four blind soldiers and thanked them for their service.

At the ceremony, he spoke only a few words, praising NDG's soldiers and the monument. Two girls gave him two bouquets. As he was leaving NDG Park, going down the Decarie, he



accepted a rose from a young woman named Berthe Lefebvre, who ran up to his car and kissed his fingers as he went away. Since then, the monument has always been the site for Remembrance Day in the borough.

A revitalization: Place Vimy

The next part of the article incorporates the memories of Russell Copeman, CDN-NDG's borough mayor from November 2013 to 2017 and NDG councilman from 1994 to 2008.





"When I was very young, it was very well attended. The veterans and members of the Legion would first go to a church service at Trinity Memorial Church, and then would march onto the into the park."

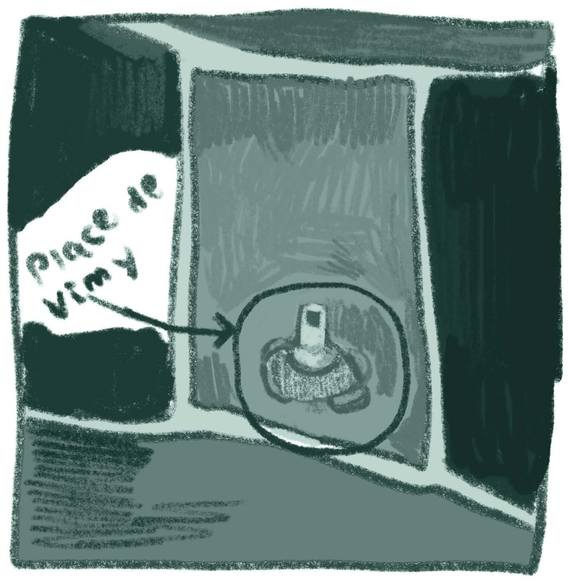


Copeman has lived in NDG all of his life and attended Remembrance Day ceremonies every year at the park with his father, who was a W.W.II RCAF veteran. Over the years, the increasingly smaller crowds that gather have disappointed him.



What started as Vimy Park in Outremont changing its name to Jacques Parizeau Park in 2016, became an effort to revitalize NDG park's monument, explains Copeman. The then mayor, Denis Coderre met with Copeman to discuss the idea of rejuvenating , saying that the city would pay for the transformations. He also brought up the idea of changing the area's name.





"I was never in favour of renaming NDG Park to Vimy Park, but the park is so large we just thought why not take part of it centred around the cenotaph and call it Place de Vimy within the park?"

Copeman also hoped that the redesign would give the ceremony a more significant role in the community.

N'OUBLIONS JAMAIS
NEVER FORGET

On April 9, 2017, the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, the city inaugurated Place de Vimy at NDG park, commemorating the loss of lives and unveiling the memorial.

One of the days that I'm most proud of as borough mayor was that day for sure.

"Strangely enough, it also occurred the day my father-in-law was buried."

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Parks often seem static. Unlike stores that close without notice or friends who move away, a park can't disappear or change without notice. Throughout its lifetime, NDG Park has transformed: the pavilion and placette, the play structures, and the dog park are a few examples, but those changes weren't surprises. There's not much that can shock someone about their local park. This is what made August 22, 2017, so strange.

That afternoon, a thunderstorm sprawled through Montreal, leading to the formation of a microburst, a weather condition that causes an outpouring of heavy winds within an area of four or fewer kilometres. A microburst's winds are concentrated and can go up to speeds of 100 km or more per hour, having the ability to devastate an area. Although the city experienced the storm, the microburst took place in NDG , its winds tearing through trees in the area.

Russell Copeman, borough mayor at that time, recalls the evening of the storm. For the illustrations of NDG Park after the storm, I referenced Patrick Makariak's videos on YouTube, with his permission.

On the afternoon of the 22nd, I think fairly late in the afternoon, city Hall City Council was in session.

4:30

We knew there was a thunderstorm. The stained glass windows in the Council chamber were being pelted with rain. There was obviously some very strong wind. To my recollection, those windows leaked a little bit.

Early evening the mayor came up to me and said, there's been some pretty significant damage in NDG because of this thunderstorm.

I said to him "I think I should go."

The fire department had set up a temporary command center on Monkland Ave. at Madison.

I recall having some trouble getting there. There were lots of trees down and lots of wires down.

The head of the Montreal Fire Department was also out of the country on the holiday, so it was the deputy director, Richard Liebmann, who was in charge.

We weren't calling it a microburst. We didn't know what had happened.

I spent quite a bit of time that evening with Mr. Liebmann and other emergency team leaders to try and assess what was going on.

There were city crews, our own blue collar workers were ready to start trying to clean the streets up. even that night, but there were so many wires down that we had to wait for Hydro Quebec.



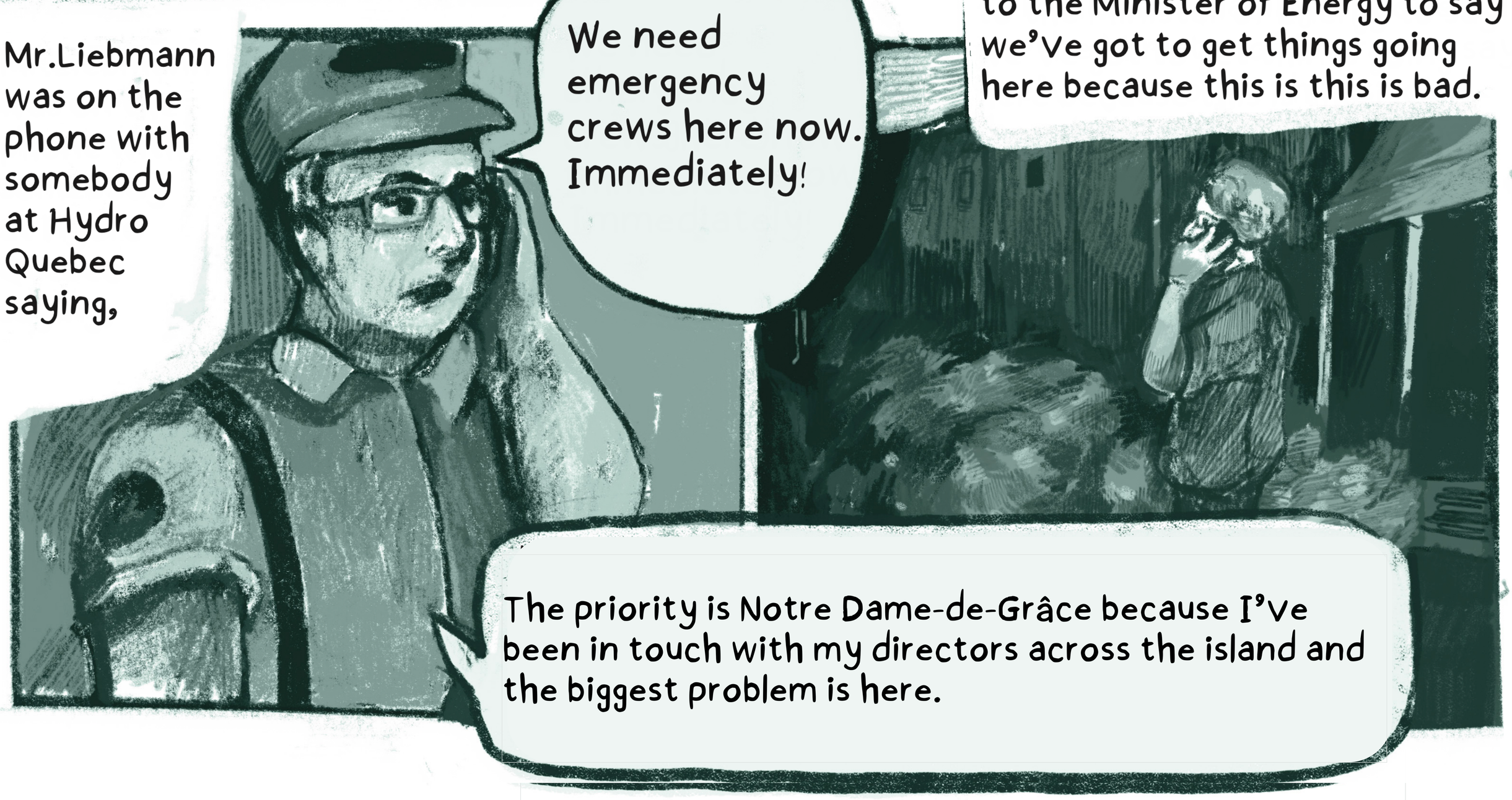
There was a frustrating period where we were waiting for Hydro Quebec and I recall very distinctly...



I remember placing a phone call to the Minister of Energy to say we've got to get things going here because this is this is bad.

Mr.Liebmann was on the phone with somebody at Hydro Quebec saying,

We need emergency crews here now. Immediately!



The priority is Notre Dame-de-Grâce because I've been in touch with my directors across the island and the biggest problem is here.

And the final thing I remember very distinctly is at one point, Hydro crews started arriving, and the police wouldn't let them through because they had barricaded off certain areas.

I don't know if I got ahold of the police , but I said, "Look, this is crazy. I appreciate you don't want people coming into this damage area, but these are Hydro Quebec crews. I mean, you got to let them in.



It was really only the next day that we sent crews into the park to look at the extent of the damage and realized how severely the park had been damaged.

I remember discussing with our Director of Public Works at the time, and the acting borough director. You never really want to close the park, but they just looked at it & said . . .

"Mr. Copeman, it is too dangerous."

"There are trees that have been damaged. There are branches that have been splintered, people are going to get hurt. We need to physically close the park,"

The assessment of the work required was fairly significant.

I remember speaking to Mayor Coderre to say we need to put out a call to neighboring boroughs and neighboring municipalities to send crews, because otherwise our people are just going to be overwhelmed.



I recall them saying, we're gonna need help. We don't have enough crews. That happened, I would say fairly quickly.



I remember a crew from Beaconsfield working in the park. I talked to them and thanked them for helping us out.Côte Saint-Luc helped lots of neighboring municipalities helped.



NDG Park Comic.indd 37 2025-01-05 2:47 PM

On September 9, 2017, the public could enter the park again. Instead of the usual leafy canopy above their heads, park dwellers looked up to see a blue sky above them.

“My recollection is that almost 100 trees in the park were damaged in some form and some had to be completely felled, “explains Copeman. According to the arboretum sign at NDG Park, the storm completely tore down over 45 trees. More than a year after the storm, the previous city councillor, Sue Montgomery, planted the first of many new trees at the park. By May 2019, these younger trees experienced their first spring in the park.

The exact number of fallen trees remains mysterious; however, the city’s arboretum sign says that they planted 81 trees at the park after the microburst.

In a map received from the borough of Côte-des-Neiges–Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (CDN-NDG) through an access-to-information request, it appears that in the southern end of the park, where the landscape incurred the majority of the damage, the city proposed the of planting 73 trees of 20 different species. From those, 36 were going to become a part of the NDG Park arboretum.

Map that CDN-NDG sent me, recreated in ArcGIS



According to the borough of Côte-des-Neiges–Notre-Dame-de-Grâce's Planting Master Plan for 2024-2028 , which came out in 2023, NDG Park now has a total of 286 trees. Trying to map these trees becomes difficult as the data on Quebio, the public database of trees, differs slightly from what currently exists.

Most common trees in NDG Park, according to Quebio's records



Data provided by Quebio, 2025

A new sense of place

While I was trying to figure out exactly how many trees do or do not exist, I realized the precise number of trees at the park and how they got there is a story of its own, but it has nothing to do with establishing a sense of place at the park. Since I never experienced the park before the storm, I asked residents who had been there what the park was like and how it transformed.

"It completely changed the way that the park functioned as a refuge within the city," explained Camelia, who grew up in NDG. Before the microburst, the trees acted as a barrier to the noise and city energy that Sherbrooke Street brought.

Camelia's memories of the park stretched from her early childhood to her later teenage years. With her friends, she would spend time by the statue, secluded from Sherbrooke, under the cover of the trees, hanging out and smoking while feeling hidden from the world

outside. After the storm, the park felt more exposed. “It lost its nurturing, hug-like feeling,” she said, “It became vulnerable even, because those trees were protective.”



When I ask long-time NDG resident Brian Murphy to describe the southern corner of the park, the place he hung out the most during his adolescence in the 60s and 70s, he describes it as “much denser” with a “forest kind of feel”. The word he ultimately arrived at was cozy. Decades before Camelia, Brian and his friends used to sit in the grass at the southern end of the park, smoking and playing music.

Despite the storm, some believe there was positivity in the transformations it brought. “It seems like as part of the rebirth, it brought people back to the park,” explains Jeffrey, recalling how the park has gotten livelier, with people lying across the grass in the summers.



"It pulled down all these trees, which of course is a bad thing, but a lot of people feel it was actually good because it opened up the park," explains Brendan Kelly, Montreal Gazette columnist, NDG resident, and recreational DJ. "In the last decade it has really changed,"

NDG Park's history hasn't been all rosy. During the 80s and 90s, residents knew the park as an area for drug dealing during the nights, even going so far as to say they did not feel safe walking there. By 1996, the situation was improving. In fact, members of an organization known as NDG 2000 won the annual women's safety award from the Comité d'Action Femmes et Sécurité Urbaine (CAFSU) for their work on improving the safety in NDG for women through exploratory walks.

This was also the same year that a group of NDG residents came together to encourage the city to clean up NDG Park. One of their suggestions was bringing in a dog park.

Living here for two years, I never would have thought of the park as an unwelcome place at night, nor could I have imagined the coziness of the grass when the trees were still around.

All I have are my observations of a park, which doesn't include anything before the year 2023.

However, one evening as I walk through the park,
I overhear an older man talking about his history with the park. Passing by the monument, he points to a patch of trees. " That's where we used to get high," he says to the group he's with, "That used to be our hang out spot."

The area he pointed to was the southern end of the park, by the monument.

It's where Camelia and Brian hung out. Every time I walk by it, there are always groups of people gathered together, smoking, chatting, and enjoying time together.

I guess that's something itself: no matter what perception of the park one prefers, there is no way to bring back the park as it was before the storm.

However, it seems as the



trees grow, the front of the park is reverting to the sense of place it had before: a cozy place to gather with friends.

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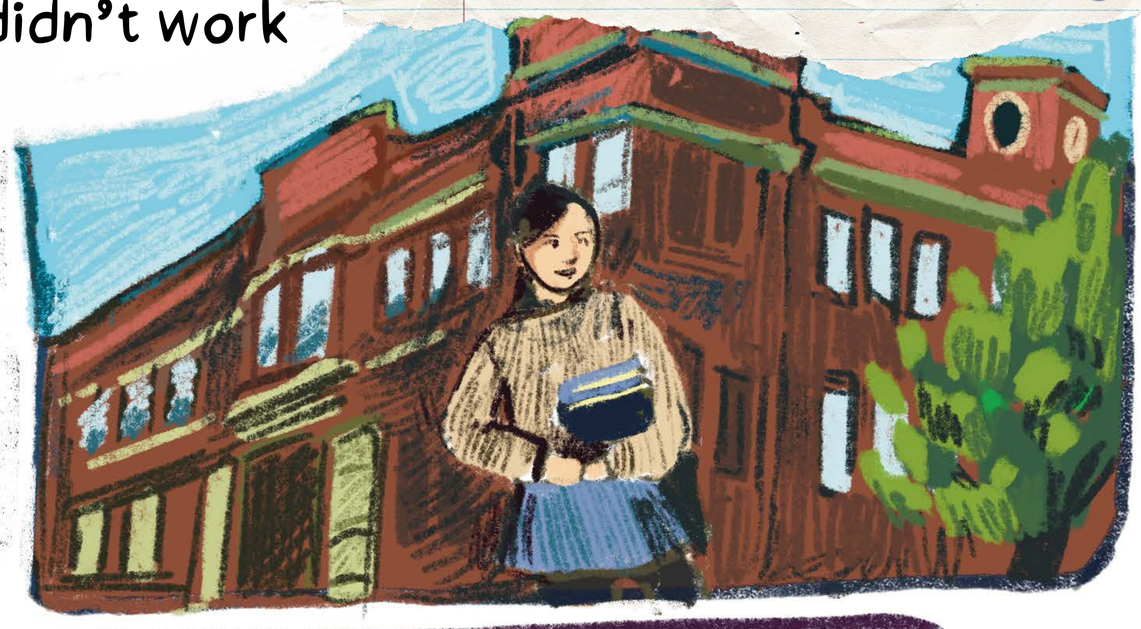
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Nicole's Memory

I moved to NDG in May 2017. I had a brief stint living downtown for maybe four months and that didn't work out very well.

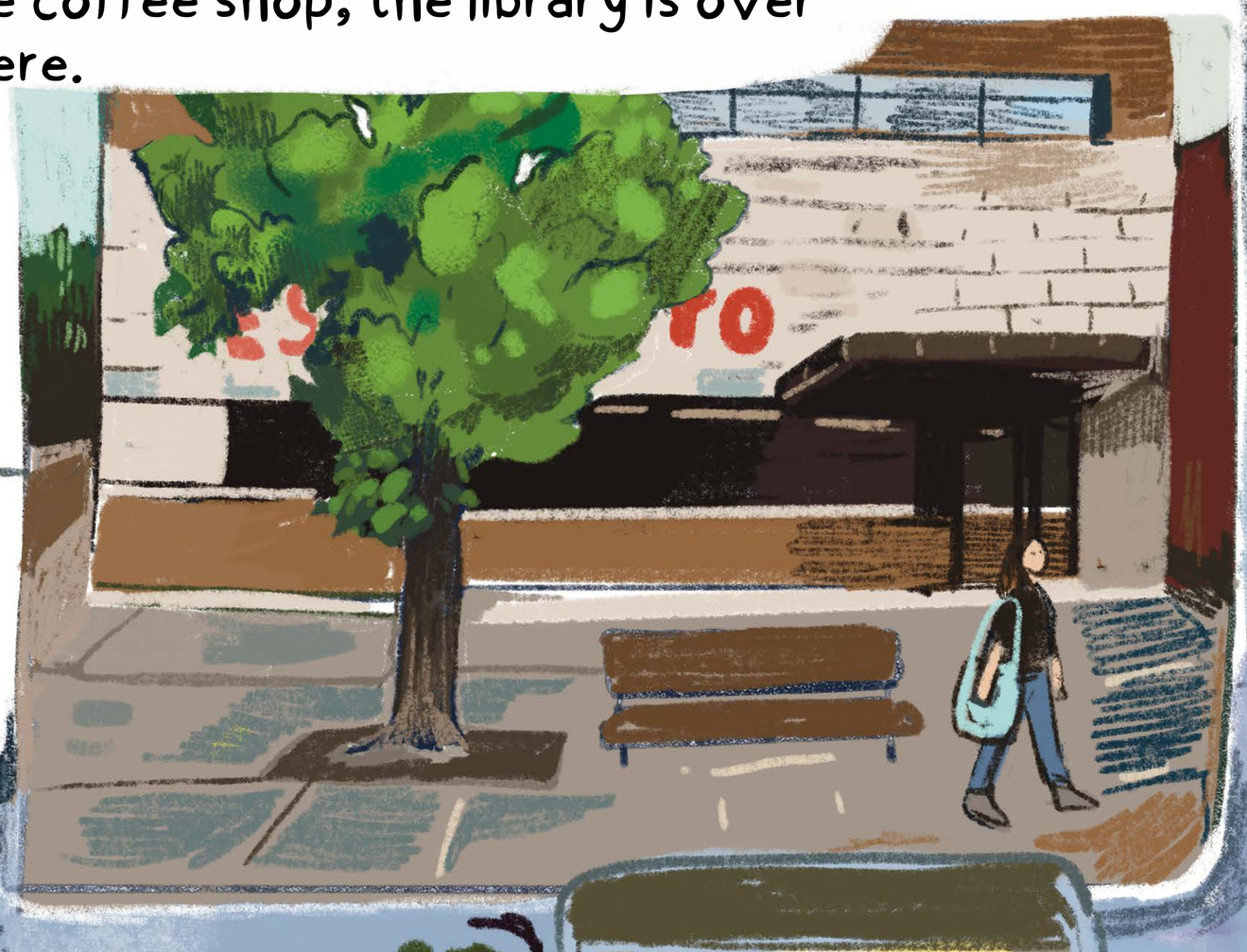




I moved back in November 2021. For me, the whole stretch of Sherbrooke that Girouard Park covers, that's been home.



Everything I need is within that stretch, so there's the grocery store, the coffee shop, the library is over there.







You know, how in old European towns there's the town square, and everything else branches out. For me, the park functions like that. Everything for me stands in relation to the park.

So when I was a student, I mostly spent time on the south end of the park closer to Sherbrooke.

Now I spend most of my time on the north end of the park where the benches are next to the dog park.

I had this one picture in my mind of my friend lying on the grass with the sunglasses on, and she's turned away because of the sun. Her book is next to her. That's what I think of when I think of Girouard Park when I was a student

10K

When I started running last year, I ran for the first time around that park, so it's kind of sentimental and special to me, in that regard.

Now, when I think about the my Park in my memories. I think it's mostly just memories of just me being by myself. I really like sitting on those benches

One of my favorite memories that I have is sitting on a picnic bench near the baseball diamond.

I brought a cup of tea from my house.

I sat on the bench, and I was feeling really antsy about wanting to see the sunset.

I was like, I need to hurry. I'm gonna miss it. It was getting late, but all around me there was other stuff going on, like people playing soccer and petanque, somebody's playing the guitar.

It was like all sorts of magical little moments, and I was really worried about missing the sunset.

That's like a solitary memory that I have from this era of my life and this park. I re member it was my fifth NDG spring.

it reminds me of the song by this Canadian singer named Ron Sexsmith. It's called, "Spring of the Following Year "

May 9 7:49 pm

The sights of Girouard park I see a family playing volleyball
I see an older couple looking to see who can throw the farthest
I see some young people kicking a soccer ball I wanted to come out here to sit in the setting sun, I was a bit concerned that itd be too late to catch it But I ended up catching a whole other kind of magic this evening

It's like all these different things will change. I don't know what they will be, (...) One thing is certain, I have this feeling for you.

It's kind of cool because it's like Girouard park is almost, to me, something that doesn't change very much.

It's like returning to a place that holds on to its character, and it's grounding for me...

This place has known me throughout all these different versions of my life and all through these different hardships, and it keeps me grounded.

One of my colleagues suggested having a barbecue at the park.

They bought some food from Esposito down the stree, and we just had a barbecue at the park on a day of Rendez Vous.

Everyone was dancing and it's like, oh my God, we just planned to have a barbeque, and we're having a music show too.

It was just so amazing,

Jeffrey's Memory

I've lived in NDG for 36 and a half years.

Do you find yourself going to the park?

Almost every day.

I can cut through the park and go diagonally, which I usually do, just to see what's happening and experience a bit of space away from cars.

What do you usually see in the park on these walks ?

Well, you know, it depends on the season.

As you enter the park, there's often people sitting on the benches along the path.

On a summer's night, you'll see kids playing baseball

In the in the winter, you see people skating.

You end up walking through what had once been a wading pond, which is now the sort of public space where they have the Rendez Vous...

I love the sled bank, where there's shared sleds.

You don't have to have brought a sled from home. You can go for a slide any how.

There's people hanging out in the summer. Lots of people, cross leggged in the grass

... or sometimes people in the the tango school are doing tango dancing in the summer.

I noticed since the pandemic, there's a lot more people in the park. Even since the big storm of 2017, which destroyed so many of the trees, it seems like as part of the rebirth, it brought people back to the park.

My son was about four years old, a real daredevil, he's still is, he's 38 now. I was teaching how to write his bicycle in the park.

His sister's hand me down bike.

It had brakes, but he hadn't learned to use the brakes yet.

He was pedalling around the chalet and being adventurous, then he starts going down the hill towards the monument

and at the bottom was this grilled fence and he started picking up speed...

I could not catch him, So I was running after him, trying to instruct him on how to how to hit the brakes

and he just he didn't he didn't know how...

And we didn't get there

CRASH

He bashed in the fence

Luckily he was not hurt at all.

He got a little scrape on his finger, but it was it was this extremely scary experience.

I asked him, he's in the middle of the Pacific right now, tell me something about the park, and that was the thing he brought up.

What do you remember about NDG Park

The biking incident!

My kids had pretty free rein.

!!

They they'd collect the caps in that box.

I just kind of let them do it. It was something I found kind of disgusting, (...) but, I didn't want to tell them not to do it

THE AMERICAN SLIDE WHISTLE

TRY IT IT WILL AMAZE YOU!

It sat in it sat in a drawer in her front hall and they were like great variety of caps. They're like of all kinds of different beer brands.

My daughter reminded me of is they not only collected them in that box, but they ended up taking Styrofoam and putting the beer caps on and mounting them like like a butterfly collection

DEVISSER DOW TWIST CAP

MOLSON Light

CANADA

SOL

HEINEKEN 0.0

It was a sort of artistic display of the beer caps...

...which kind of gets to my daughter's career.

My son became a wildlife biologist.

Having this thing, like a butterfly collection of beer caps, kind of spoke of his interest in understanding nature and and finding ways to present it in an educational way.

She's she ended up being an artist who worked in collage and found materials and so on. So it kind of presaged her eventual career.

One more...

I often walk in the park in, you know, it's a good relief from the heat and the sun, right?

So my wife and I walked out there one evening (...) Maybe it's ten years ago

His son's playing baseball and we kind of catch up and...

There are these kids playing baseball there, and I found one of my friends. He was there coaching his his son, so there's that casual neighborhood thing about running into people, right?

If I want to underline one thing that the park means to me: it is a social space.

Brian's Memory

Well, I was born in Montreal and grew up in NDG.

My connection with NDG Park is like many people's connection with NDG Park who lived in this community.

It was first based on school because there were so many schools that surrounded the park.

And went to the church that's just behind the park, Saint Augustine's, at the time.

I went to school at Daniel O'Connell, which is just up on Prud'homme.

...and of course, as kids, you go through the park and where do you hang out? So, I was like many other kids.

I slid down the hill behind where we're sitting right now with my toboggan, and I played hockey with my friends or skated on the rinks here in the winter.

Subsequently as we moved into summer, there would be baseball.

About three years ago, two of my friends who I walked to school with everyday and I got together.

We all met at at the monument. These are men in their 60s, if you will, in their 70s. and we walked up to our old grade school. Then we walked down, and we went to our favorite place to eat when we were teenagers, which was the Chalet Barbecue.

It was like a center for activity. It was great. It was wonderful.

Sherbrooke Street had a theare right in front of us at that time, which was called the Empress Theatre.

EMPRESS TEA ROOM

and there was a tea room beside it.

People would go there for drinks and coffee as we got older.

There was a photography shop over on the other corner right opposite NDG Park, which I sort of dropped by every time I was in the park because I eventually ended up being in a business that was associated with photography.

N.D.G. PHOTO SUPPLY

We had this tradition in school: our textbooks had to be covered, and the banks all around here would give you covers.

So we went to the bank right over here, the Bank of Montreal (...) We would all go in and get our covers and our blotters from the bank. It was form of publicity.

Well, I met my first girlfriend here, which was kind of cool.

She was a Saint Augustine's girl...

and I was a DOC boy.

Those were the periods where it was very gentle and very simple, and not nearly as complicated as it is today.

She was the sister of one of the guys who had a motorcycle

Having your girlfriend was giving her an ID bracelet, a bracelet with your name on it you gave her, and they were cheap.

She wanted to hang out in the park, but her mother said that she was only allowed to hang out in the park if she stayed with her brother.

Her brother, the last thing that he wanted was to have his little sister hanging around while he was being cool with his motorcycle. He was like 17, and she was 14, right?

That was fun, but that only lasted for a summer.

Anyways, he was quite pleased that I would ask her if she wanted to go for a walk, go hang out. So, yeah, so he covered for us.

As we got older, we moved into the Woodstock generation, if you will, and this became a center for music, and a great place to come and smoke a joint, if you felt like it. You would find hippies at that time all placed all around the monument.

There were a lot of big trees all along here there, so this area here was very popular for people to make music.

It was all wood music at the time, guitars and so on and so forth.

The monument was the meeting point. From there, we gravitate to see what was available.

I at the highlight of my career, I was a mediocre guitar player. I played all the time. One of us always had a guitar with us.

That's what got me involved in what I do now because, I realized that at early stage that I was much better at (...) dealing with all of the technicalities surrounding making music than I was at actually making the music.

"For me, it's my anchor. I know I'm home when I see the park"

I just sit here and I just enjoy the fact that I'm alive and I grew up in this community.

When I moved back to Montreal from Vancouver, and we came through here looking for a home, it was wonderful to drive by. My wife was saying...

"What are you staring at?"

I said...

"The park. This is the park, I love the park. It's so cool."

A Sense of Place at the Park

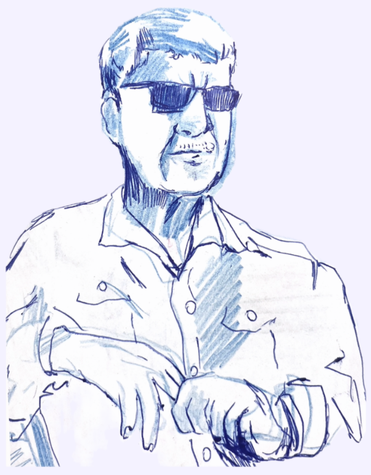
Now that you've explored the park, let's see if you agree with different NDG residents' perceptions of its sense of place:

Jeffrey Kastner, a memory interviewee and Director of the NDG Historical Society : "If I want to underline one thing that the park means to me, it is a **social space.**"

Nicole, a memory interviewee: You know, how in old European towns there's the town square and everything else branches out. For me, the park functions like that. **Everything for me stands in relation to the park.**" "This place has known me throughout all these different versions of my life and all through these different hardships, and it keeps me **grounded**."

Jerôme Glad, founder of Rendez-Vous NDG and associate at Belleville Placemaking: "Although it doesn't resemble a **town square**, because it's in a park, it really has the same effect." "Ultimately, it's a truly **meeting point**."

Camelia, who grew up and lived in NDG: "Some words that come up are **community**, that's an easy one, but I think **development** (...) the park taught me about people and about the world and about who I could be as a social being."



Brian, a memory interviewee: “And as I grew older and went through school, it became a **meeting place** for everybody.” “For me, it’s my **anchor**. I know that I’m home when I see the park.”



Peter McQueen, City councillor for Côte-des-Neiges-Notre-Dame-de-Grâce: “I would say NDG Park is a **jewel** (…) it is perfectly situated to be that **central space**.”



Silvano De la Llata, Associate Professor in Geography, Planning and Environment at Concordia University: “What I like is about this park is that you can come here as a **refuge** (…) It has this very peaceful feeling.”



Russell Copeman, former borough mayor and city councillor for Côte-des-Neiges–Notre-Dame-de-Grâce and current Director General of the Wilfred Laurier School Board: “I’ve always had, as I said a strong connection to the **cenotaph** there,” “As I grew older, it (my connection to the park) became more of a **community focus** than a than an individual focus.”



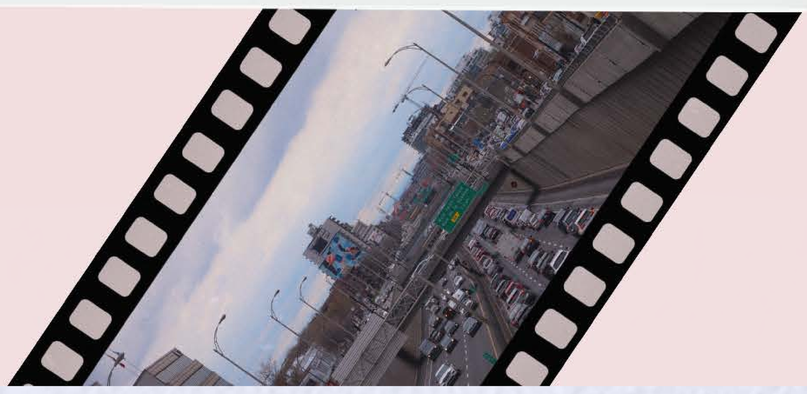
Jonathan Emile, Jamaican-Canadian hip-hop recording artist: “Girouard Park is really like a **congregating** area for families and for festivities in on the West side of Montreal” ”Montreal's a big park City, but that park, I have a lot of fun memories at.”



Brendan Kelly, Montreal Gazette columnist and recreational DJ: “The thing about the park is it **naturally brings people out**. People are coming to the park anyways because it is a **hub** for all of NDG. “

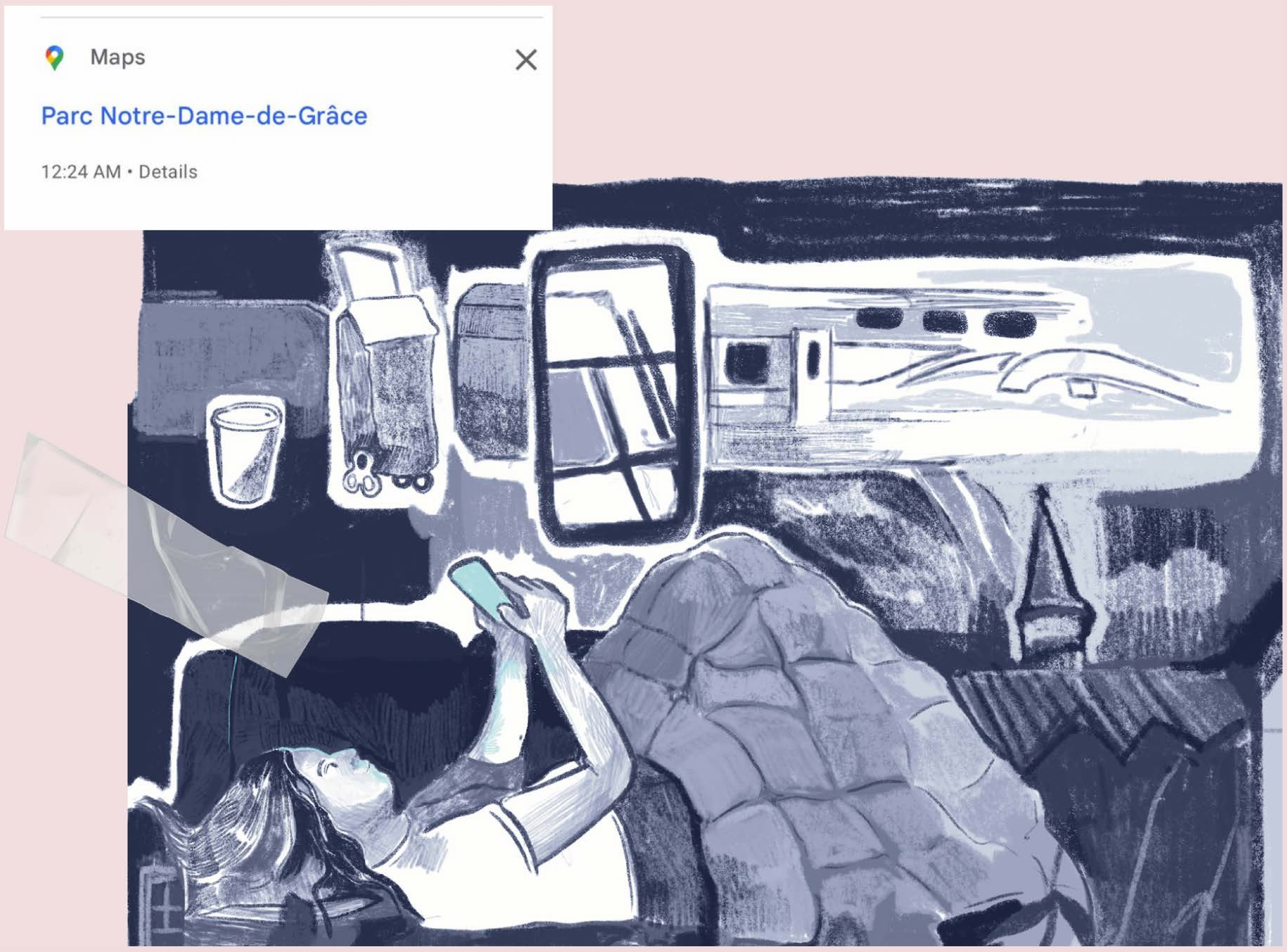






My (Sara's) Memory

My first photo of NDG Park was from before I knew it was a park. I have two pictures of the River's Edge Community Church amongst budding trees on a rain-soaked April afternoon in 2023. It was the first time I was in Montreal that I knew I would be living there soon. Everything felt imminent. That afternoon, I was actively looking for apartments and had failed at finding one I liked. With its lens pressed against my back-seat window while my dad drove through NDG and Snowdon , my camera snapped every time a part of Montreal



intrigued me. The green church roof stood out amongst the gray clouds, catching my eye as we headed back to Ottawa. According to my Google Search history, the first time I thought about NDG Park was around midnight one week later. It was early May, hours after I had returned home to Ottawa from Montreal and secured my first apartment near the Vendôme metro station. The email confirming that the landlord had accepted my application arrived in my inbox at 11 pm. Lying on the couch trying to fall asleep, I scrolled through Google Maps and swiped on Safari searches to learn about my new neighbourhood. Despite having to work in the morning, the prospect of living somewhere new after 20 years in Ottawa and having an apartment of my own made me restless.

I first discovered the train routes for the bulky gray EXO cars that passed my new apartment's window, then moved to the realm of grocery stores. Once I realized the nearest big grocery store was a 12-minute walk, I started looking at carts with wheels. Then, I searched how far I would be from my nearest coffee shop and then my campus, by car and on foot. The end of my search brought me to my future gym and finally NDG Park.



I could not explain why, but the idea of a park near my new home was exciting to me. Although my dad had made our small plot of greenery in Ottawa more grandiose by planting a willow, a maple, a linden tree, and multiple evergreens, I barely used my family's backyard; a fear of ticks and bees drew me away. A public park was different. Unlike our quiet and fenced piece of land,

a public park had an element of being elsewhere. Yes, this park was mine, but it was also everyone else's. People would flow through the pathways, on the fields, and under the shade of the trees. I could be at home here, yet I would be included in the pulse of my neighbourhood as a bench sitter or occasional artist, amongst the ball kickers, play structure folks, and dog walkers.

Future searches brought me back to the park a few times, but my first visit happened on a warm July afternoon. I had twenty minutes for a walk before my cousins and I were going



to return to Ottawa. Our visit barely lasted 24 hours, as I had accidentally bought tickets for one cousin and me to see Pitbull the same weekend we were supposed to spend in Montreal.

Now, it seemed like it was for the better. With seven people in a small studio apartment, an immovable kitchen island, and a range of different heat levels we found comfortable, sleeping had proven to be challenging.

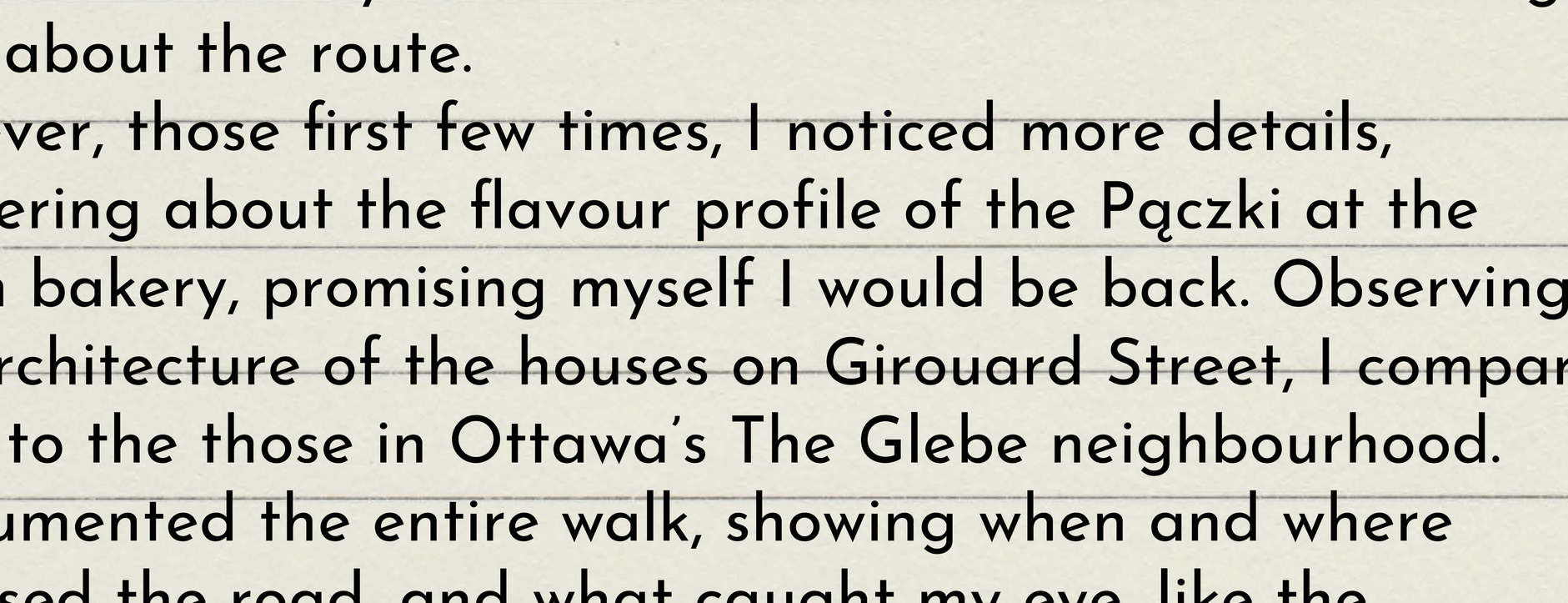
I had calculated that I had six minutes to walk to the park. That would make the journey last 12 minutes and the destination six, with a two-minute grace period for photos. The lack of time made me leave my camera packed in my bag, but I brought my phone. On a day that was growing more and less overcast, depending on the different parts of the sky, I left my apartment, searching for directions to the park on Google Maps.



The route I took, left on Sherbrooke Street, past the Decarie Expressway, with the view of the Saint-Jacques bridge that my mom called “Washington Tower” , to the Chalet Bar-B-Q restaurant with its comic-book-like sign at the corner of Sherbrooke and Addington Streets, and crossing the road at an intersection where traffic lights that never seemed to be green at the right time, was something I had to look up. Now, nearly two years later, the same path is so ingrained in me that I walk it every time I miss the bus without even having to think about the route.

However, those first few times, I noticed more details, wondering about the flavour profile of the Pączki at the Polish bakery, promising myself I would be back. Observing the architecture of the houses on Girouard Street, I compared them to the those in Ottawa’s The Glebe neighbourhood.

I documented the entire walk, showing when and where I crossed the road, and what caught my eye, like the dépanneur that I thought I would visit regularly but never did.





The first time I properly visited the park was on August 13, 2023. Earlier that week, I had walked through the park on the way to Monkland Village , but that evening, I found myself on the benches facing the Empress Theatre, just across from the park on Sherbrooke Street. I could lie and say that I was looking at the Empress, but I honestly cannot remember looking at its details until autumn. My sights were set on the closed travel agency with the Farsi and English lettering. It reminded me of a similar one I had seen when I last visited Iran in 2021.

In my first real week in Montreal, I was on the hunt for similarities that could make this unfamiliar place a home. I had walked a marathon through the city for the same reason two days earlier. On my last night in Montreal until late August, I wanted to leave my apartment, so I decided to put the adage I believed to the test: I would go to a



place that was both mine and public. The details of what I did at the park are foggy, but I remember trying to get myself to sit still, listen to music and soak in the setting sun. I was vastly more unsuccessful than I thought, lasting around seven minutes and seeing two dogs before I began my walk home.
My encounters with the park all follow a similar structure.
I walked by it or through it as it transformed through the seasons. On chilly evenings when the nightlife buzz from the Plateau Mont-Royal felt like too much and a quiet downtown too sombre, I found myself walking on Côte-Saint-Antoine Road by the skating rink. The slap of the puck was just enough energy to remind me that life was bubbling in my neighbourhood.



When I made this park the subject for my thesis project, my relationship with it changed as well. I began to understand its inward workings, but it also stopped being a park. Every time I was there, I felt like I was obliged to pay attention to it. With this project ending, I am unsure what my new relationship with it will look like. Will it become a reminder of young adulthood in a new city?

Although I say that my relationship with the park has changed, the idea of being a park dweller was always more of a dream than reality.

Beyond this project, the park has always been a more transitional space; it is the constant presence that reminds me I am at home every night, whether I am on the 105 bus or walking home from Vendôme metro. It is the occasional walk through the trees every season as I observe life from a distance. When I am a passerby, the park is not a subject; it is scenery, and it is a sign that I am in *my* neighbourhood.







My positionality: How I fit into NDG

Within this work, I wanted to establish a connection to the community I was working with, so I intentionally selected a place that I feel connected to already and a park that I frequent.

For this project, I have done research on the park for eight months (October 2024 to May 2025). Throughout this project, I've regularly visited the NDG Historical Society and am grateful for the help of their director, Jeffrey Kastner. Jeffrey has helped me verify the history of NDG Park with his sharp historical insight (If you want to learn more about NDG's history, look no further than his master's thesis).

Beyond this project, within my master's, I spent four months working on researching NDG and its different community groups from September 2023 to December 2023.

Outside of academia, I've been a member of the NDG and Montreal community since August 2023. By using a first-person perspective in the article, I establish my role as a community member and allow myself to be vulnerable but displaying my gaps in knowledge and local context as a newcomer

My process explained

Memory comics

I found 2/4 of my interviews through a callout on Facebook. One memory comic was with a community connection I had made within the project, and the other was a journalistic interview. I'm immensely thankful for their time and their trust in this project.

For each interview, I conducted one or two pre-interviews to help me formulate the main interview questions, determine any additional considerations, and read through the consent forms.

To decide where the interview would take place, I made sure that the process was collaborative between the interviewee and myself. I would often offer suggestions for locations if the interviewee was unsure. Ultimately, in all the cases, the participant gave the final say on the location: one was at the participants workplace, another in a cafe due to a storm, one at the park, and one over Zoom.

During the interviews, which were relatively conversational in structure, I took several reference photos of the interviewee and anything they felt was critical for their story, and asked them to send me any photos or notes they thought would be useful as well.

After they talked about their connection to the park, I asked them if they had any items they felt represented these memories.

For approximately four to six weeks, I worked on their comics. When I needed their insight on a frame or a story, whether it was through a question or an additional photo, I reached out to them via email. In one case, I showed a participant a part of their comic to make sure it was accurate. After the completion of the comic, I asked the interviewees for their thoughts on the final piece. Once they were happy with it, I published it here.

The journalistic interviews

Outside of the comics, I've talked to several people who have impacted NDG Park and its sense of place throughout the years. These interviews were with community members, local leaders and people I knew of through news or word of mouth. I had background information about them, but they knew nothing about my project beyond the message I had sent them. These interviews followed standard journalistic procedure.

Illustrations

Throughout the past few months, I've both drawn from life at the park, illustrated people's memories, and made graphics based off of archival retellings. This project would not be possible without the City of Montreal's Archives , the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ): National Archives and Bibliothèque Nationale Archives , Head and Hands Archives , Concordia University Library's Special Collections and Archives , and Le Devoir and the Montreal Gazette Archives provided through the BAnQ. All drawings are my own and do not directly reference a pre-existing image that isn't copyright free, unless I credit them.

Notes and guide

Throughout the entire process of working on this project, I took illustrated notes and reflections. These notes, some of which I have used in other parts of this project, provide insight into my process, connection to the park, and notable moments throughout the process. Based on my notes and research, I've also created a guide to capturing a sense of place using local and graphic journalism. The next two sections look at these !

Guide

Creating graphic journalism in a local/hyperlocal context



When I started this project, my aim was capturing how a place could evolve throughout time and how I, as an artist-journalist, could convey that transformation through graphic journalism.

Transformation, to me, means both physical changes, such as businesses shutting down or new buildings being built, as well as more sentimental ones. How do certain happenings, minute details, and the people we know change the way we perceive a location?

What I am trying to capture is a transforming sense of place. This term holds multiple definitions across different disciplines, but all of them point to a person's physical and psychological connection to a place. As journalism researchers, Robert Gutsche and Kristy Hess describe it, a sense of place generates a feeling of comfort and inclusion within a location, and highlights how someone fits into the wider world.



A sense of place is unique to its beholder because we all have experiences and meanings we associate with a place. Simultaneously, there are commonalities between our senses of place because of the shared physical characteristics of a location we've experienced or live within.

When I tried to define a sense of place, I observed both journalism and comics research. Comics scholar Rikke Platz Cortsen has discussed how illustrating familiar locations, writing relatable place-related dialogue, utilizing specific signs from an area, and showing how a place connects to the world (2015). writing relatable dialogue, utilizing signs from a specific area, and showing how a place connects to the world outside can help establish a sense of place (2015). Within the scope of newspapers, journalism researcher Carrie Buchanan has said that writing about places that are within a newspaper's geographic boundaries can help display a local sense of place better than expanding beyond it (2018). What they both get at is that a sense of place requires an understanding of a location's past, present, and people who are a part of it.



As I worked on this project, what I learned is that you can only capture a transforming sense of place in graphic journalism by borrowing approaches from other forms of journalism (and even other fields), modifying them to fit the illustrated approach. Graphic journalism takes elements from place-based journalisms, like local and hyperlocal, to understand a current sense of place. Concurrently, it needs oral history to allow one to observe the past sense of place. In this

guide, I'll discuss my process and explore how you can apply what I learned from capturing NDG Park's transforming sense of place to other communities and spaces.



Local journalism and graphic journalism

To truly understand a community, you need to become a part of it. McAdam and Hess highlight that this means connecting to the people in that place, understanding it, learning about it, and personally embedding oneself into it. (McAdam and Hess, 2024). If you are working on a project in a particular neighbourhood, I strongly recommend doing your research iteratively and then talking to people who live there. Each of these is relevant: talking to community members helps you understand a place and build trust. The connections I established in this project were not just connections for the sake of information; I was genuinely interested in the stories of people I reached out to and how they all linked to the story of NDG Park. By getting to know these different people and embedding myself into the community, I felt more accountable to accurately capture their sense of place.

Research is also extremely important because it allows you to look at the location you're researching from a distance. You can see its past, its stories, and how they all fit into its present. Reviewing archives, news stories, books, and even blog posts can provide insight into what events and people most impacted an area, and how that place fits into the larger scope of the community. Although these findings might not directly impact your project, you'll have more points of reference when you talk to community members, and they are telling you about the history of the place you are developing work on. This is beneficial in two ways: you will understand how their retellings fit into the place's history, and they will see that you actually know about the place you are researching, so they may provide more information.

Oral history and graphic journalism

Sometimes, someone's recollection is so relevant that it becomes a snapshot of history itself. Conducting an interview utilizing methods from oral history becomes key to accurately capturing a sense of place, as it allows you to capture their entire story, not just a snippet of it for the sake of an article. It also gives the interviewee more authority. They are a narrator, and I, as a journalist, am helping frame their story in a way that's truthful to them. Beyond that, an approach that utilizes oral history can help establish a closer bond with the interviewee and encourage more natural dialogue. The process of informed consent, pre-interviews, and making sure that the interviewee knows what they are getting into and how you will ultimately use what they tell you also becomes more significant.



This is what my practice looked like, and how it compared to oral history:

Oral history	My approach
The narrator gives informed consent	The interviewee gives informed consent.
The person being interviewed is the narrator of their story, emphasizing that they are a "live human subject" (Oral History Association, 2018b)	Although I do refer to the people I interviewed as interviewees, their role was closer to that of a co-narrator. I embraced a narrative interview approach (Kartch, 2017), allowing them to tell their own story. My role was asking open-ended questions, listening, asking for more details, and posing follow-ups (Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 2016)
There is no standard verification method in oral history. The facts of the interview are verified using pre-existing documents and sources. Other historians can verify the account by comparing it to other oral histories. (Feldstein, 2021, 21). Concurrently, Columbia University includes a section on fact-checking in their guide, highlighting that it is light and done in collaboration with the narrators (Bertin-Mahieux et al., 2022, p.3). Although a fact might be false, it might provide valuable information in other ways (Bertin-Mahieux et al., 2022). Some argue that there is not enough verification, and oral histories complement historical documents (Berman, 2023, p. 80).	I fact-checked my interviewee's retellings to the best of my ability using standard journalistic fact-checking methods from "The Truth in Journalism Fact-Checking Guide: Fact-Checking Lived Experience" (Baker and Fairbank, 2022) and elements from the CBC's Peter Johnson's "Visual Verification Workshop" , which I attended in-person (Johnson, 2025).
The narrator reviews their interview transcripts and gives corrections (Faulkenbury, 2020, p.257) (Baylor University Institute for Oral History, 2016).	The interviewee reviewed the entire final comic and provided their feedback. This procedure is closer to oral history than it is to journalism. Typically, a journalist can send a source a snippet of their article for verification, or a general description of the article (Kent, 2020).
The oral historian makes interview transcripts available publicly, archiving their work, and allowing it to be independently verified (Feldstein, 2004, p 22)	Because I did not keep the entire interview in my comic, I also will not make the voice recordings from these interviewees publicly accessible. The final comic and website will be archived to the best of my ability, at a minimum on my website and Concordia University's Spectrum, but hopefully in a printed format within the university or the City of Montreal.

If there is one takeaway here, it's that I as a journalist, was not telling my interviewee's story. My role is relaying it. I have made sure the way I ultimately frame their story is accurate and truthful to what they told me. Concurrently, I had to remember that I was a journalist. After talking to community members, I have to make sure what they are telling me is accurate by fact-checking and conducting further research, whether it is by visiting archives or reading historical sources.



Reflexivity, personal perception, and place

It's also important to gain your own sense of a place by embedding yourself in a community and establishing a connection to the physical location. What about the place sticks out to you? What communities are you interested in getting to know? Do not forge a connection for the sake of having a connection. For example, I chose NDG Park because I like the concept of a public park, and the park was a place I frequented. I talked to the people I did because their stories were fascinating, and I knew they also cared about the park. Establishing a connection to a location can also look like observing. In my case, I already lived in the community I was

researching, but I also visited the object of my research, the park, more regularly. Every few days, I would go to the park and just see what was going on. I took note of what features either stood out or repeated across the land. This activity can help gauge what the significant features of a place are that others will also recognize.

Example: List of unique features in NDG Park-> church, red pavilion, cenotaph, dog park, baseball diamond, play areas, Chalet BBQ sign, funeral home, Empress Theatre
List of repetitions-> lamps with hat-like metal lampshades, benches, paths, trees, big groups sitting together, skateboarders, events at the pavilion
Taking notes of how your perception changes is also helpful. Sometimes after a park visit, I would notice something new and write it down, or after my interviews, I observed that what people had told me was beginning to frame the way I looked at the park as well. These observations might seem minute, but your sense of place is also changing, and it helps to be mindful of that and truthful when relaying that to the reader.



Visual interview
One way that helped me understand an evolving sense of place was conducting interviews with people who had experienced NDG Park at

different times and asking them for their memories. Asking people about their memories is helpful as they often highlight what mattered to them and what meanings they associated with different events. For example, I did not realize the significance of “Sunday in the Park” to NDG residents until I talked to community members. To illustrate the interviewee’s sense of place accurately, I required a lot of specific details. To create an environment where the interviewee was comfortable sharing with me but would also remember more details about the place they were talking about, I followed these guidelines:

1. Asking about the individual’s past with the place: Instead of the traditional journalistic interview with time constraints, be more relaxed when conversing with the interviewee and open a dialogue. Ask broad questions based on your pre-interviews that allow them to explore their memories. Remember that they are sharing their story with you.

2.Asking about a significant memory of the place: Here, the interviewee is doing most of the talking. Their explanations will often be detailed, as this is their most important memory. As they are talking, note parts that you feel require additional details and highlight elements they bring up more than once. These can be significant. For example, one interviewee brought up the park’s role as they grew up from university to now, and that was the recurring theme of their story within the park.

3.Follow-ups to clarify details on the memory: After they have told you their memory, ask them any questions that came up during their retelling. Additionally, ask them for any visual details they may have missed. Make sure not to assume anything about the memory, like the season, the interviewee’s appearance, or the location where it took place. Sometimes, when someone is retelling an experience, you might visualize incorrectly. Some questions that can help are:

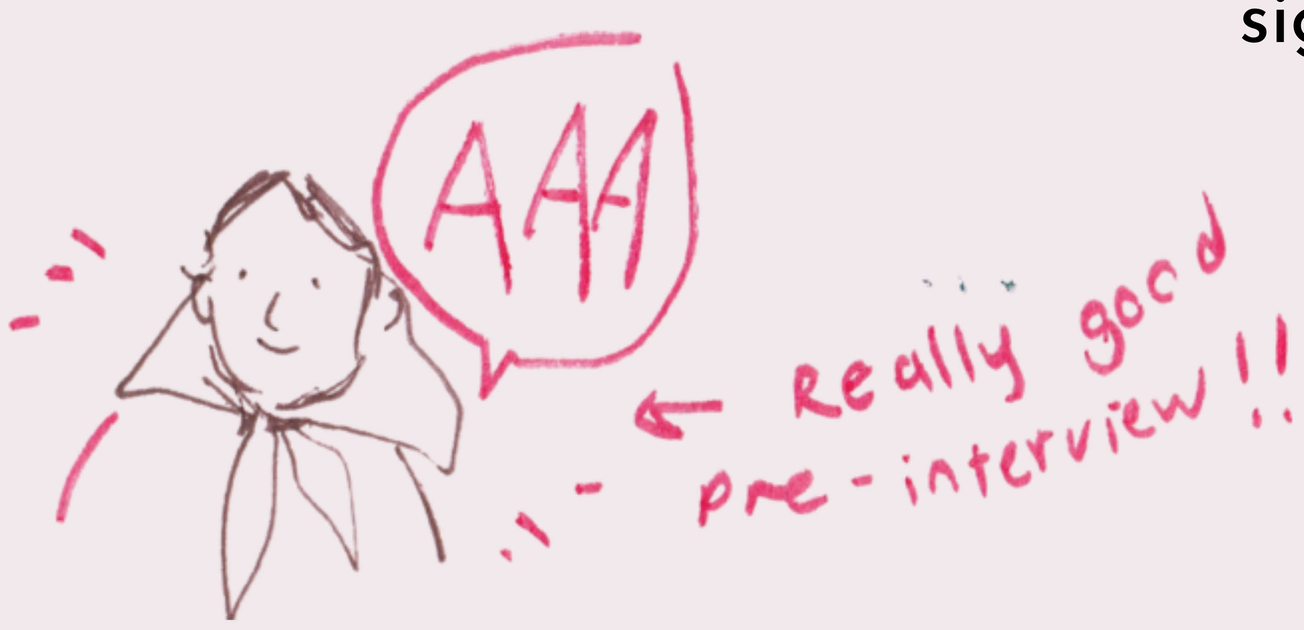
a. What was the weather like that day?

b. What season/day was it?
c. What were you wearing?
d. What did the _____ look like (e.g. What did the car you were driving look like? What did your son's bike look like?)
e. Where were you located? Could you draw it out for me?
f. Do you have a photo that might help me?
g. Did you look different then? Do you have a photo?

4.Asking what would be one word they would use to describe their sense of place at _____?
This question allows them to summarize their experience in the location with one word. Instead of trying to get at it organically, asking allowed me to explain exactly what I meant by sense of place and for them to understand it as well. It can help you frame the other memories in a way that is at the core of the interviewee's perspective. For example, if someone says the park is their "anchor", you can put together their memories in a way that shows why they would consider the park as something that keeps them grounded. This question gave me insight into what the park meant to them holistically and highlighted similarities in different people's perceptions of the park.

Consent and Connections

Throughout all the interviews, I made sure interviewees had informed consent and context of what the project's scope and end-goal were. For interviewees who play a smaller role within your project, you can explain the interview process to them when you meet them or through email, giving them time to ask any questions. For more significant interviews, the best way to get informed consent and give context is through a pre-interview.

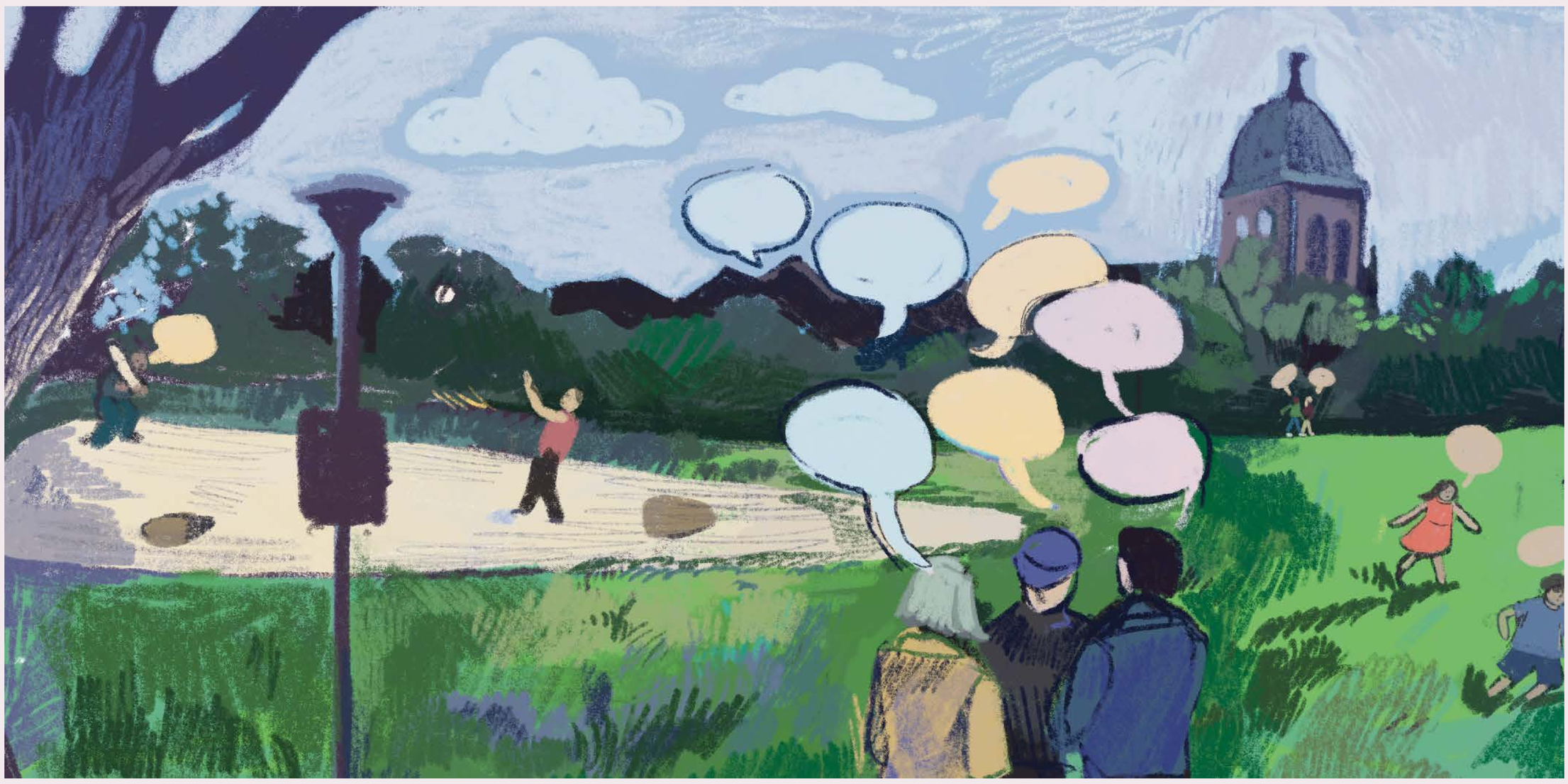


In the pre-interview, you can:

A. Establish a connection with the interviewee: These interviews are informal and are a way for you to get to know who you are interviewing. I explicitly mentioned when I would be using our conversations for the project. Otherwise, the pre-interviews were off the record, conversational, and to establish trust and connection (Benderev, 2022). These connections can pay off in the final interview because you will be comfortable with the interviewee.
B. Context: Here, you want to make sure that the interviewees understand the goal of this project. You can explain what you think the final product will look like and what their role is in the narrative.
C. Consent: The pre-interviews also focus on consent. In my case, I created two forms, a consent and journalistic information form, that I went through. These forms explained how I would use their interviews and what publishing their interviews could look like. For example, I said that I would be publishing my work on a personal but public website, and I would later attempt to get it published elsewhere. Traditionally, you do not need to do a consent form in reporting, but doing an informational form that explains the process lets the interviewee understand what they are getting into.
D. Questions: The interviewee will often have questions about the process (e.g. the use of their full name, the purpose of the project, the type of questions, what memories are important, etc.) In this dedicated time to discuss the project, they can ask these questions and simultaneously, you can see your knowledge gaps. For example, when someone asked me about why I needed their full name, I said that it's standard in journalism. However, as I thought about it, I realized that for the context of my project and their role in it, it would not be necessary.
E. Map out a rough idea of what the interview will entail: After the pre-interviews, you will know what the interviewee will likely want to talk about. Moreover, if the interviewee is uncertain about what they should talk about, you can provide guidance.

For example, if you are interviewing someone about their most significant memories of a place, a person who has lived there for over 50 years might have many. They can discuss their memories with you, and you can help them decide how to tell their story.

During the interview, consent is equally important. There may be difficult topics that come up. Here, do not push the interviewee to say more than they feel comfortable with. Moreover, they may bring up something that they do not want to include. Respect their wishes.



Illustrating the uncaptured

Throughout this project, I have often had to illustrate past events that have no photos. To fact-check and draw these happenings as accurately as possible, I followed a few guidelines:

1. Ask for evidence: Even if someone does not have a photo of a memory or event, they might have other evidence that can help illustrate the memory accurately. For example, if someone is talking about something that happened while biking, you can ask for a photo of their bike at the time. You can ask for the specific location of the event as well and see if you can find more photos on your own.

2. Refer to archives: This was the most helpful resource for illustrating the uncaptured. I visited and viewed archives from across the city of Montreal, which you can see in my citations. The archives can help you cross-reference a memory. For example, if someone says that a building used to be a camera store, you can look through newspaper archives and find an ad for the camera store to validate its location and see if there's a photo that can help you. Newspaper archives are excellent for information and photos. There are also borough/district, municipal, provincial/territorial, and national archives. If you are looking for specific information about an organization, there are also often organizational archives.
3.Traditional fact-checking: Traditional journalistic fact-checking is necessary as well. The Truth in Journalism Fact-Checking Guide is a great helper. Often, you will be able to find some verified forms of information, whether it's a written explanation of an occurrence or photos of it.

3.1. As an artist-journalist, I do not stray from this evidence and only draw what I can confirm. If I draw something I could not validate, I will highlight that by intentionally blurring its details.

4.Research through search engines: There is a lot of information available online for more recent events that can help validate them and provide visual references for illustrations. Using a search engine and highlighting specific search terms with "" can lead to sources that would have been hidden otherwise. For example, if you are looking to see the number of trees at a park, search for the terms "trees" and "park name," and narrow down the years you are looking for, and you might just find it.

5.Research through records: If you are trying to verify geography or weather, there are records and open-source maps, satellite images and street view captures that can be immensely helpful.

6. Research through social media: Going through social media, like Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter), and YouTube, can be an archive of time as well. If you are looking for a visual reference to draw an event, a YouTuber may have been there and captured it. You can reach out and ask them if you can refer to the footage and credit them. Social media is more difficult to parse through for specificity, as often the quotation marks do not work properly, but X (Twitter) still has a good search engine that allows you to search for a specific term at a specific time.

7.Search in another language (if applicable): Sometimes what you are looking for might not be in the language your mind automatically goes to. Since I primarily speak English, I looked at several English-speaking sources, but switching to French helped me find more sources, like meeting minutes and articles, that I would not have found otherwise.

An example of me putting these methods to the test was when I was redrawing the Prince of Wales's visit to NDG Park. I wanted the prince to look as accurate as possible, but there are no photos of Prince Edward at NDG Park on October 30, 1919.
However, there are other photos of him on that day in other parts of Montreal, wearing a trench coat and a hat, so I used these photos



as references. Using the descriptors in the Gazette article describing his visit to the park, I illustrated what the scene looked like, but the details are blurrier than settings that I have photos of or have experienced myself. I looked up the people mentioned in the article but was not able to find photos for most of them. Those of them whom I was able to find, I drew more visibly in the scene. In the rest of the scenes, I either used drawings of people where their faces were not visible or used hands to illustrate what was happening (e.g. when the Prince receives a rose, the rose-giver is not illustrated because I could not find a photo of her.)

Reviewing the piece



After the interviews, I concluded my work by getting those whose memories I illustrated to review it and to express whether they wanted any changes in the way I represented their stories. This was to avoid extractive methods or getting the information I need without considering the interviewee and

taking no accountability for what I produce (Wallace, 2020). This step was helpful as it allowed the interviewee to make sure I had understood them correctly. Although this is not traditionally done in journalism, I felt it was necessary in this context because the interviewee was the only person who had experienced their memory and could verify if my drawing resembled it.

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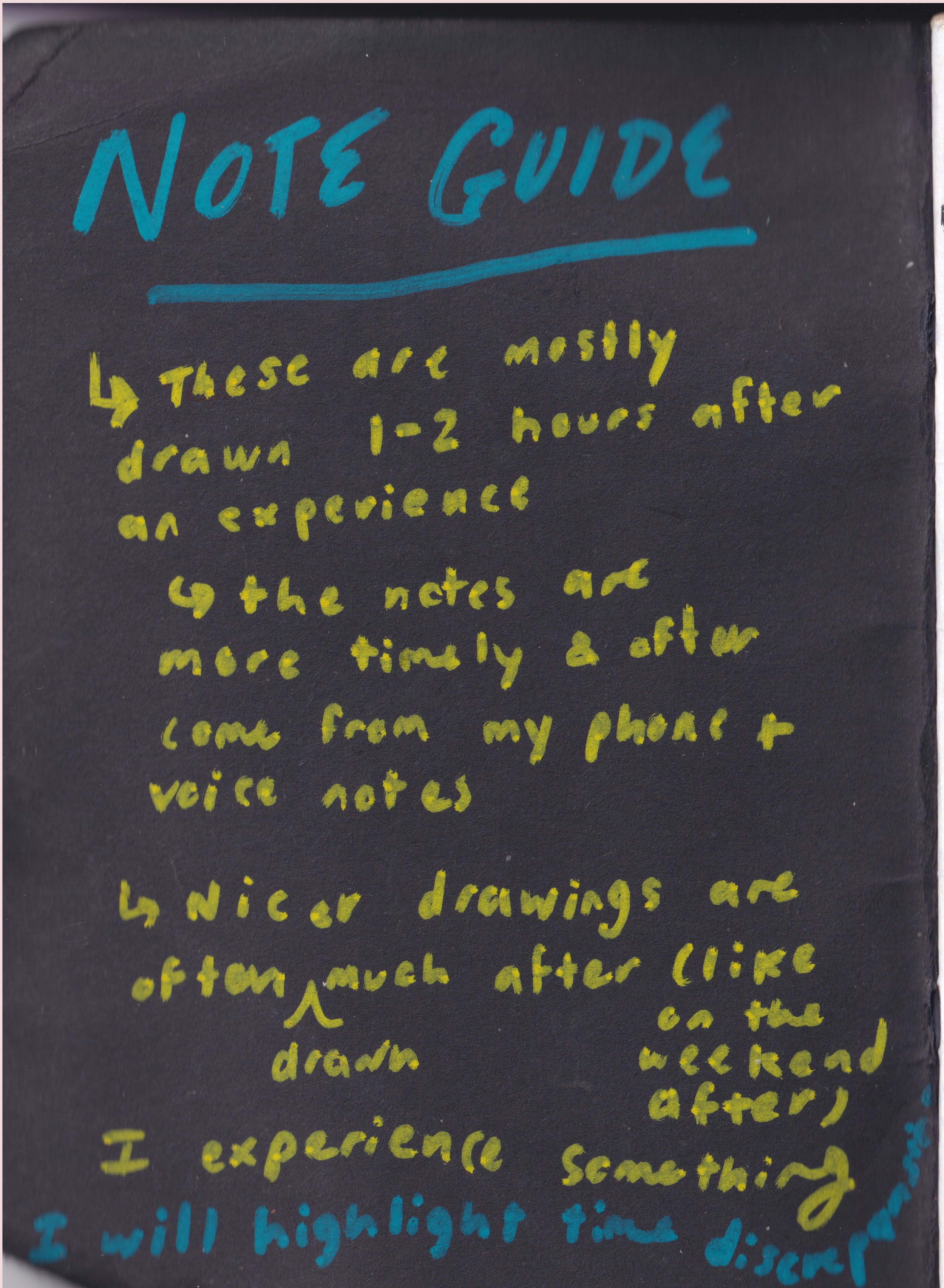
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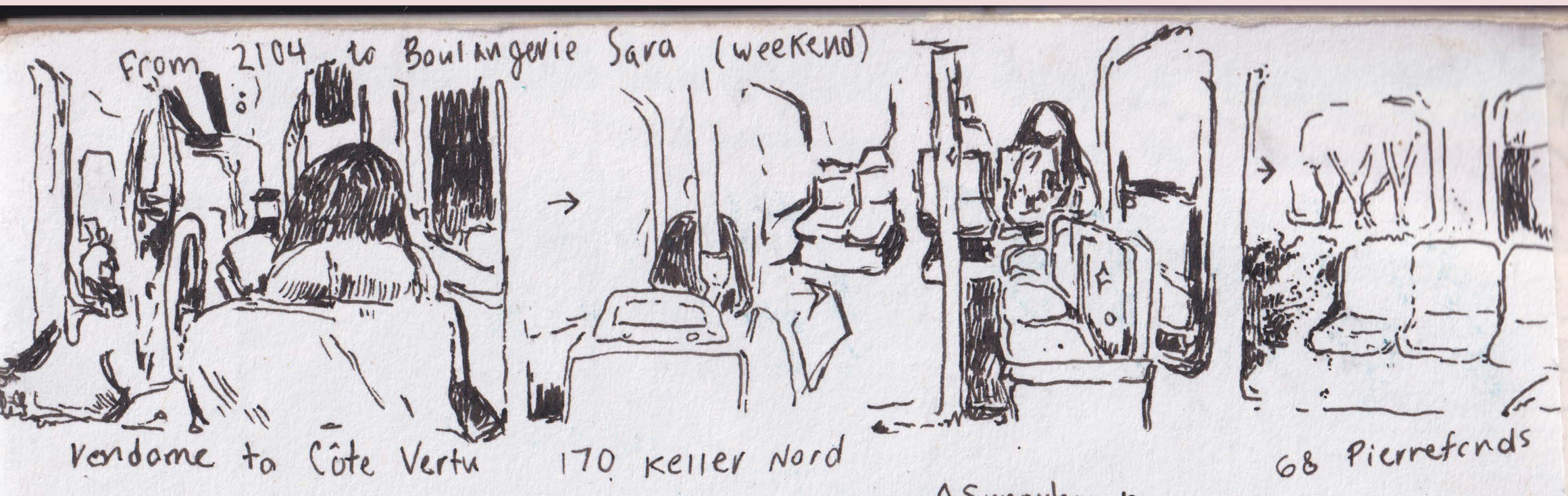
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Notes from September 2024 to July 2025





APRIL 2025

In 2023, I began these notes in a brand new 6 dollar Sketchbook I'd gotten from DeSerres the day after I decided what my thesis would be. I decided (arguably too quickly & too slowly) that I wanted to capture the changing sense of place in the borough of Pierrefonds-Roxboro with the commencement of the new REM bus

On May 1st, 2024, I got a supervisor (biggest shoutout to Dr. Elyse Amend) who also loved the idea of maps & local journalism & going a little all over the place





This is where these comics begin :

= Fall 2024 (September, to be exact)

2023, I was highly excited by big local park!

To me, it was a sign of a vibrant neighbourhood & community

The first day I was in Montreal, I walked to the park.

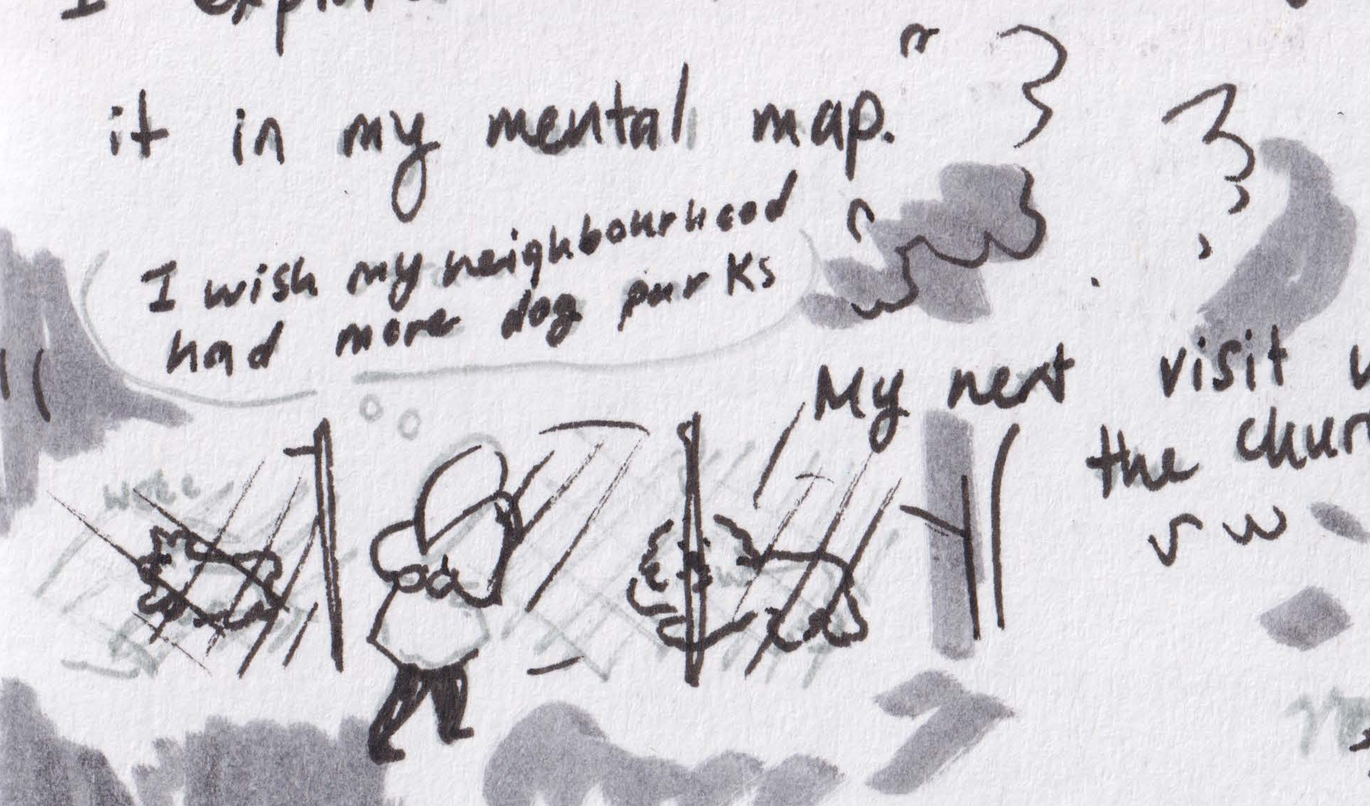
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Located at a car-filled intersection that didn't feel very inviting, the park stood out amongst the noise.

So many trees!

I explored NDG Park in pieces. My first visit was just to situate it in my mental map.





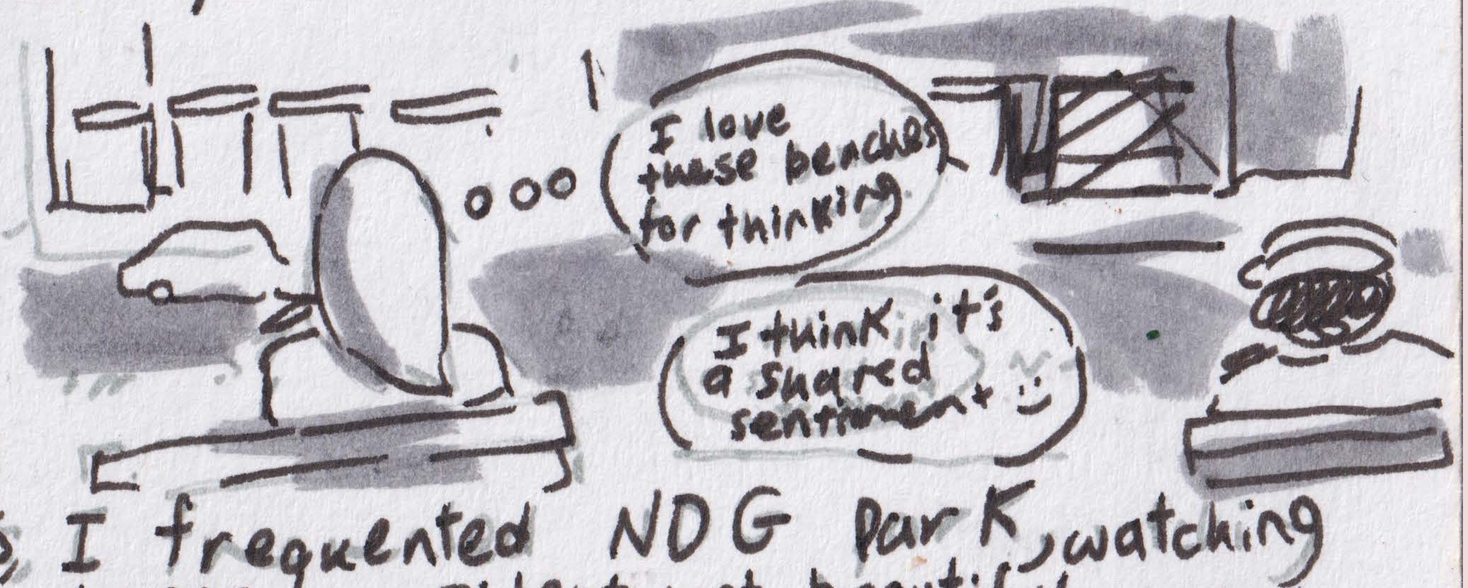
to see the dog park &

My next visit was the church.



On a hot August afternoon, I went to the war memorial.





Throughout the seasons, I frequented NDG Park, watching it transform. It was always a silent, yet beautiful presence





In my second summer in Montreal, NDG Park became less quiet.





On fridays, it would always be lively.
On Sundays, I'd watch bands play.





I met Jeffrey Kastner in September, the 19th to be exact



I'd been to the NDG community council a few times for class, but this time I was going to a meeting of the NDG Historical association



Up the stairs I went...

The room was not too busy, so I walked in, easily finding a seat

I soon found out I was the first true "vistor" to the NDG historical associatick

Kastner was a wealth of knowledge; he'd done his masters on change in NDG over the 70s.

At NDG Park

... At the pakk

In conversations with him, my vague idea began taki- Shape

... At Girouard Park

In most of his stories NDG park would be a prominent character

You know, I might be thinking ahead, but this would make a great comic

Kastner & I talked until the historical association hours had ended... & 10 minutes outside too.

He sent me a book on NDG's history & an article on the Montreal mela

My topic got approved on the first of October

Weirdly enough, that night I did out door Zumba at NDG Park, at the Rendez vous

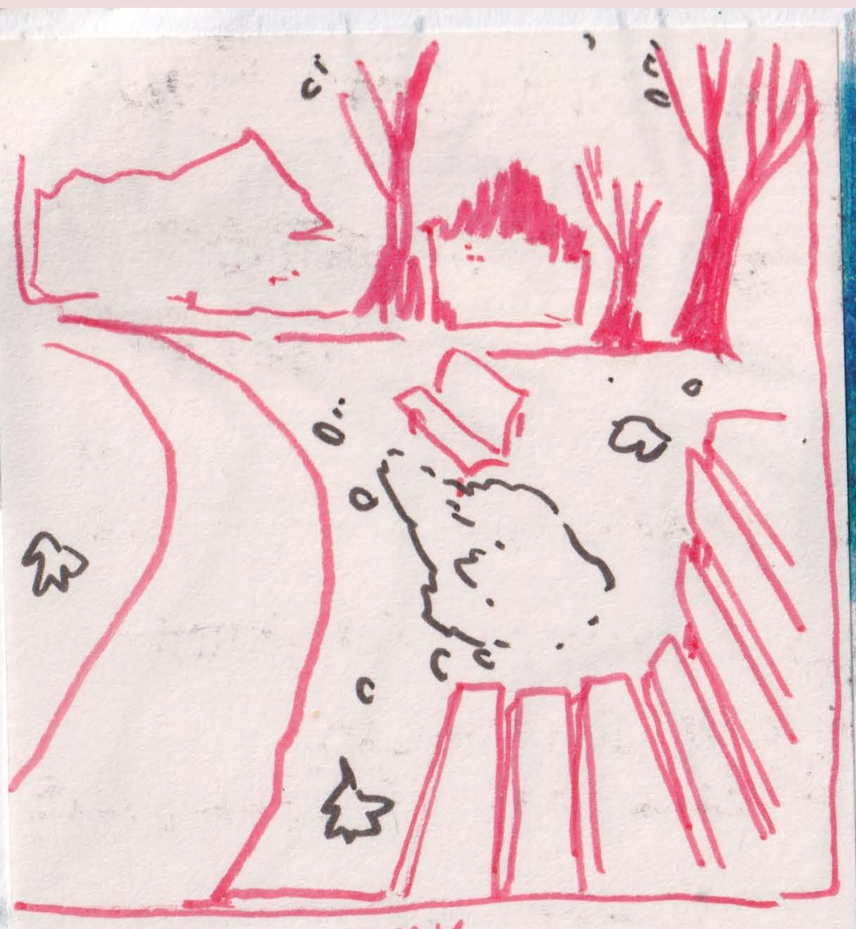
They didn't have the lights before!

Jocelyn, the instructor

The months of October & November involved a lot of writing & revising. I visited Jeffrey Kastner often, & each time, my

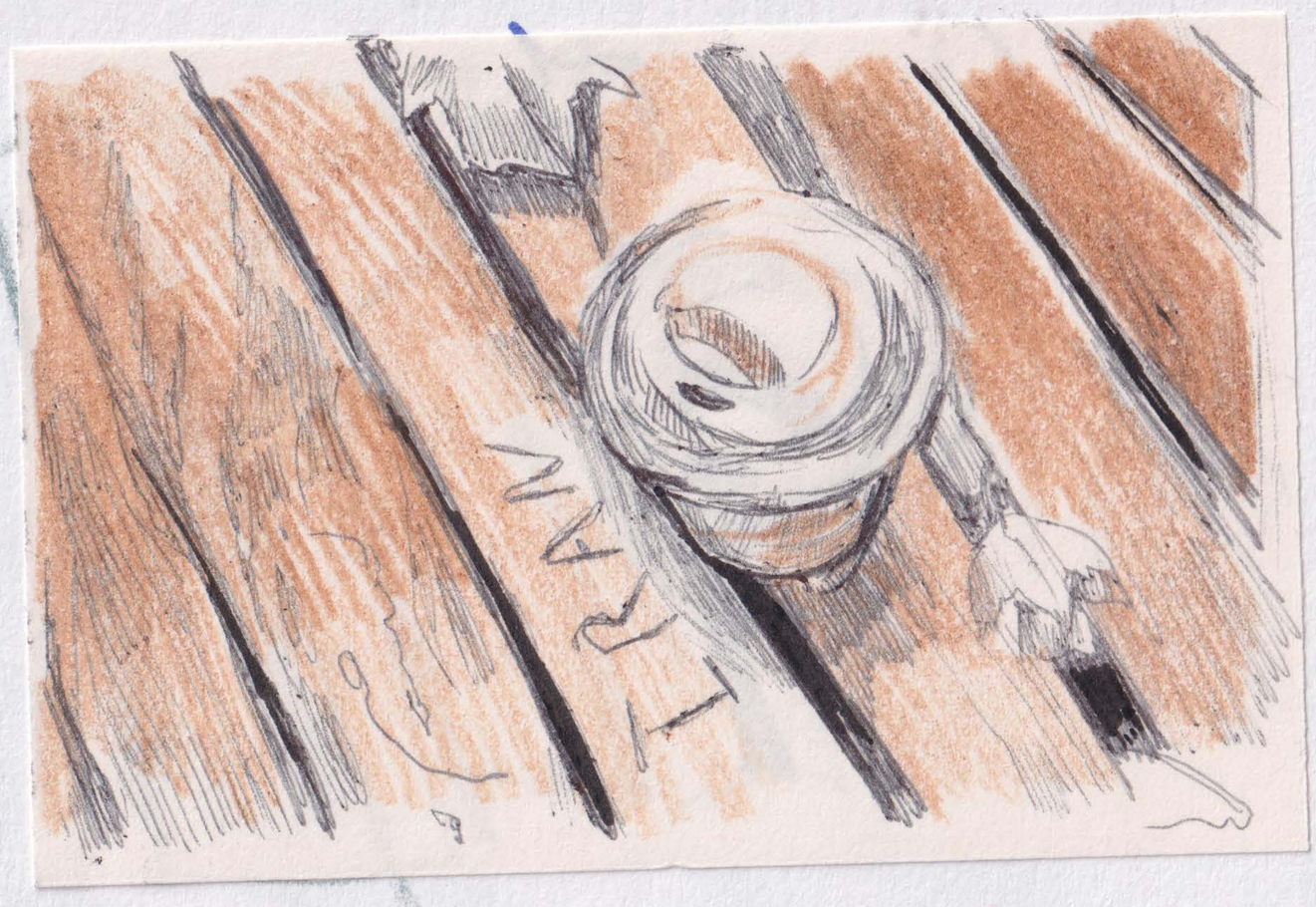


(drawn much later from photos while I was in Iran)



Not all my memories from NOG Park are good. This one actually sucks!





I tend to take a lot of photos when I'm sad & for some reason, I only have these two.

I took this one. because someone had scratched in "Iran" on the bench I sat on before a phone call I was anxious about.

It was a glimpse of comfort.

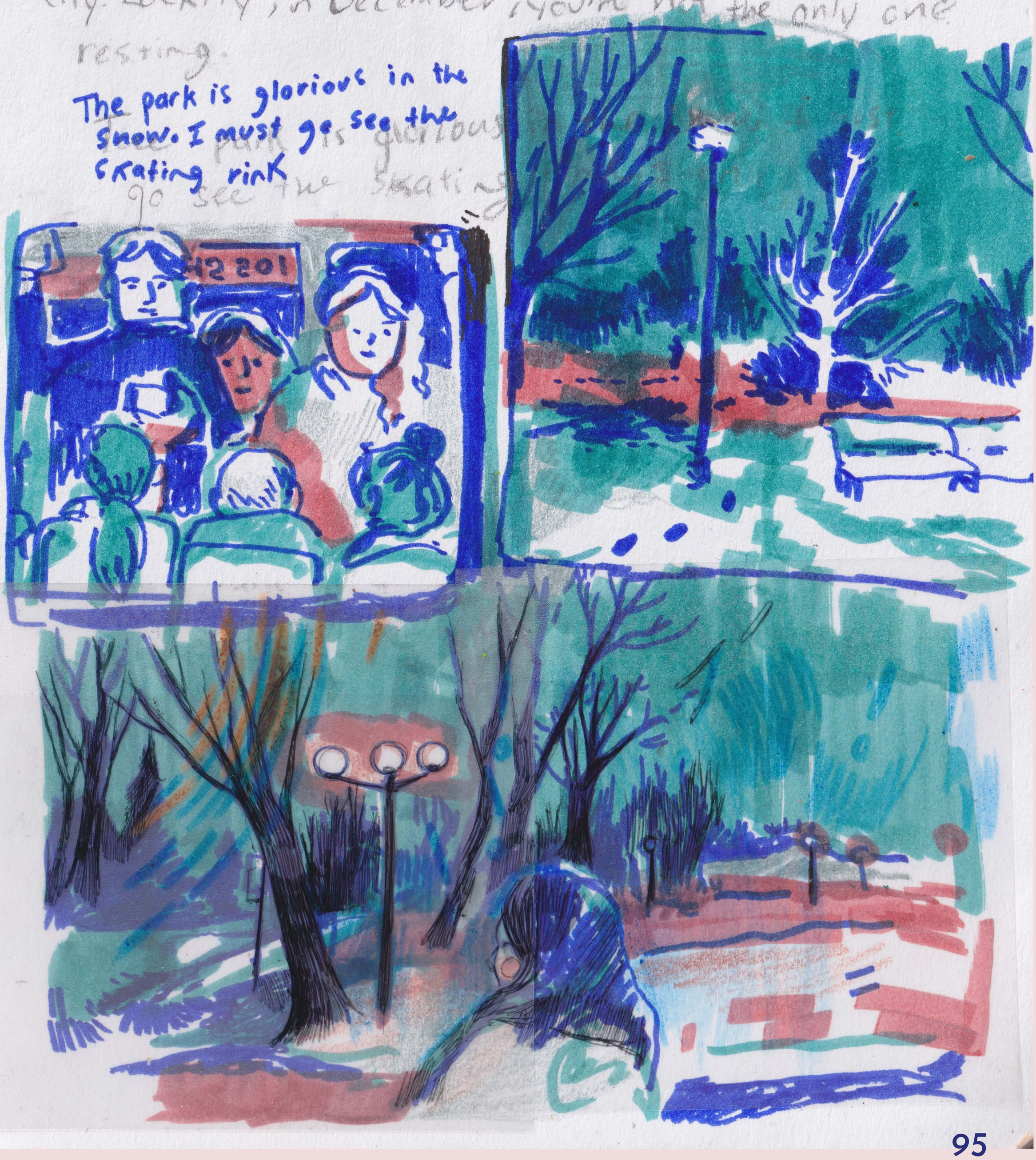
Looking back on these sketches, nearly six months later, I think about what a strange fall it was & how the park became a source of comfort through out the seasons.

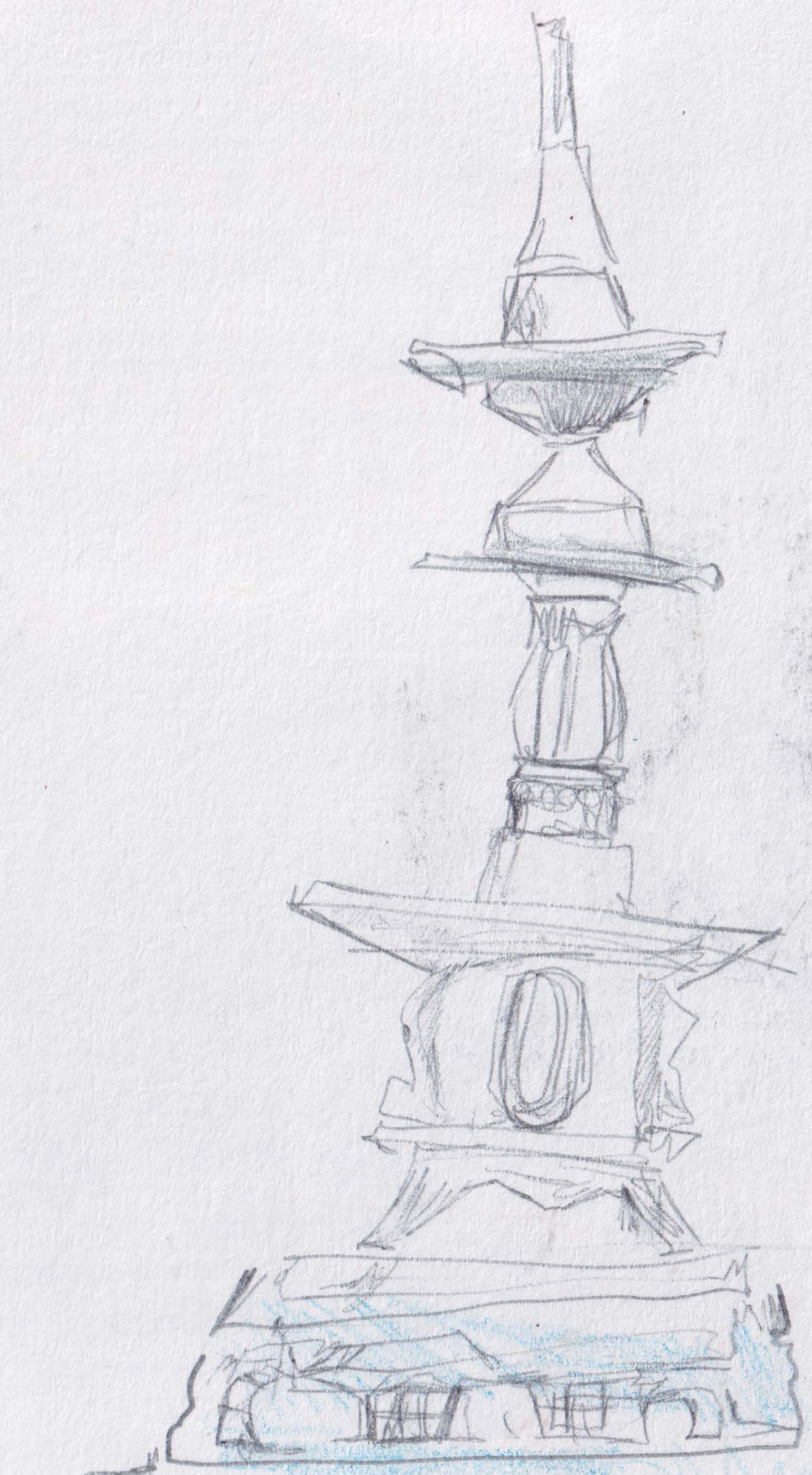


Whenever I felt glum, I took my camera to the park & observed the life around me until I felt a bit more connected & a little less self centered

Writing the ethics form has been more confusing than I thought. I've had to look at the work of others quite often & read how others conduct interviews.

It also doesn't help that it's been a month since I've focused on NDG & this project. You leave Montreal for three weeks & you come back to a different city. Luckily, in December, you're not the only one resting.





I went to the BANQ archives for the first time (properly) today. What started as confusing actually became a vastly useful visit.

I learned about an old lawsuit where architect J.A Godin asked the city to be paid for his ~~re~~designs of NDG Park.

Godin was indirectly one of my favourite architects.

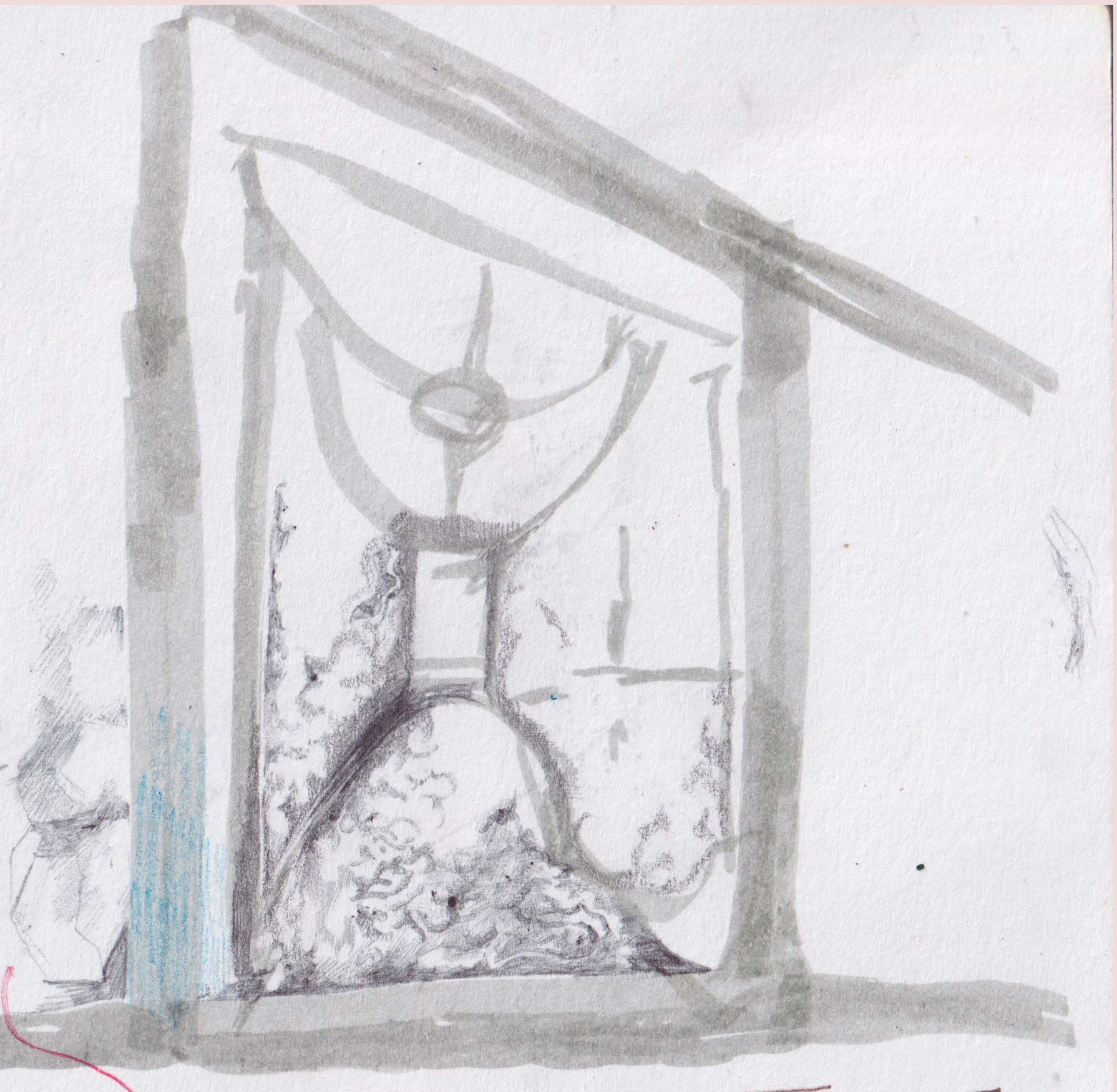
His name sake building on Saint Laurent is one of my personal Montreal landmarks, so I wish the city had let his plan come to life.



It almost makes it seem as if NDG Park is somewhat community built

a sense of place built by the people in NDG Park

For interviews
↳ well researched
↳ strong focus
↳ Good, sharp, short Qs
↳ 4: Relaxed atmosphere
↳ 5. Tells a story

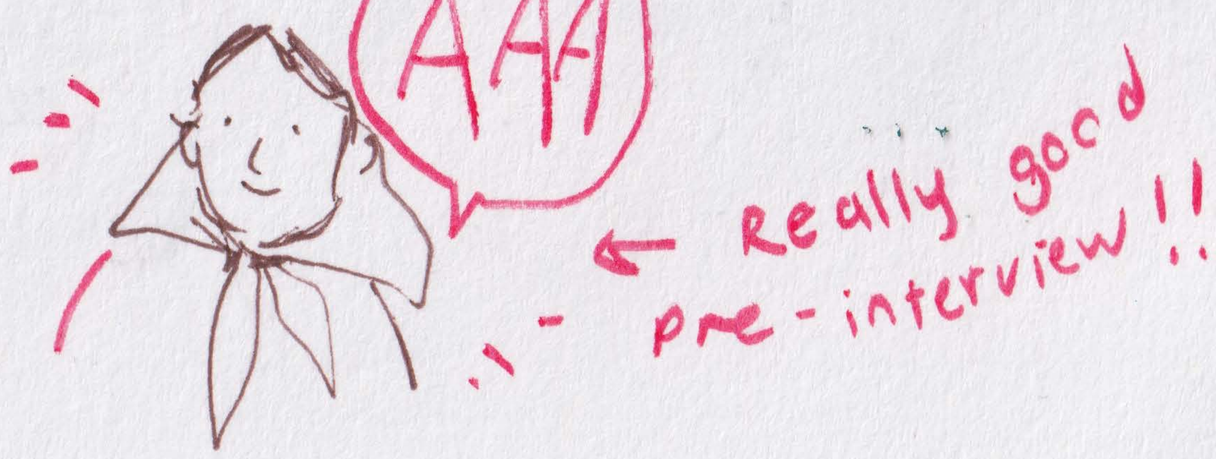


- Storytelling
- Prepare
- Focus
- Listen
- Golden Nuggets
- Challenge





Met Nicole :)



← Really good pre-interview!!

From "the Art of Interviewing"



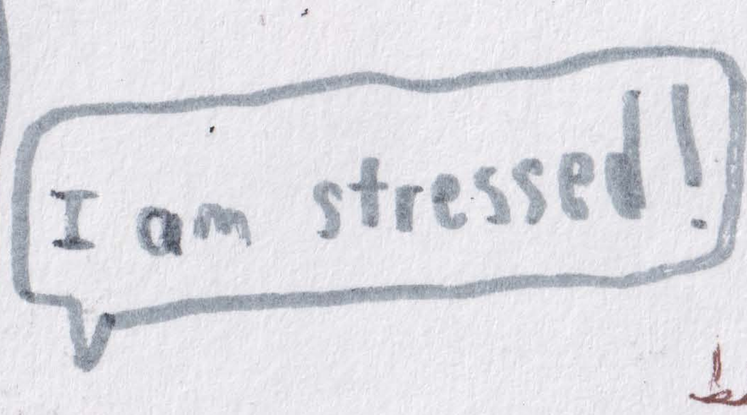
My hands
frore, so I took
a photo :)
Feb 9th





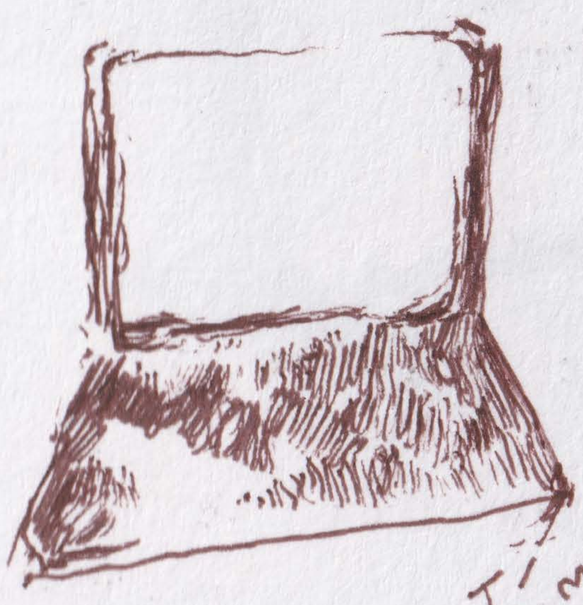






I'm very frustrated with my process. My interviews keep getting changed. People disappear & I'm bad at outreach. I wanted to be done with interviews in February, but I'm still here ::.

Maybe next week will be better. I seriously hope so.



At least I have significantly greater appreciation for this park



Jeffrey Kastner Interview!







They are useful

Post first interview thoughts

↳ A conversation worked well

↳ People have multiple memories

↳ How do I show where people live

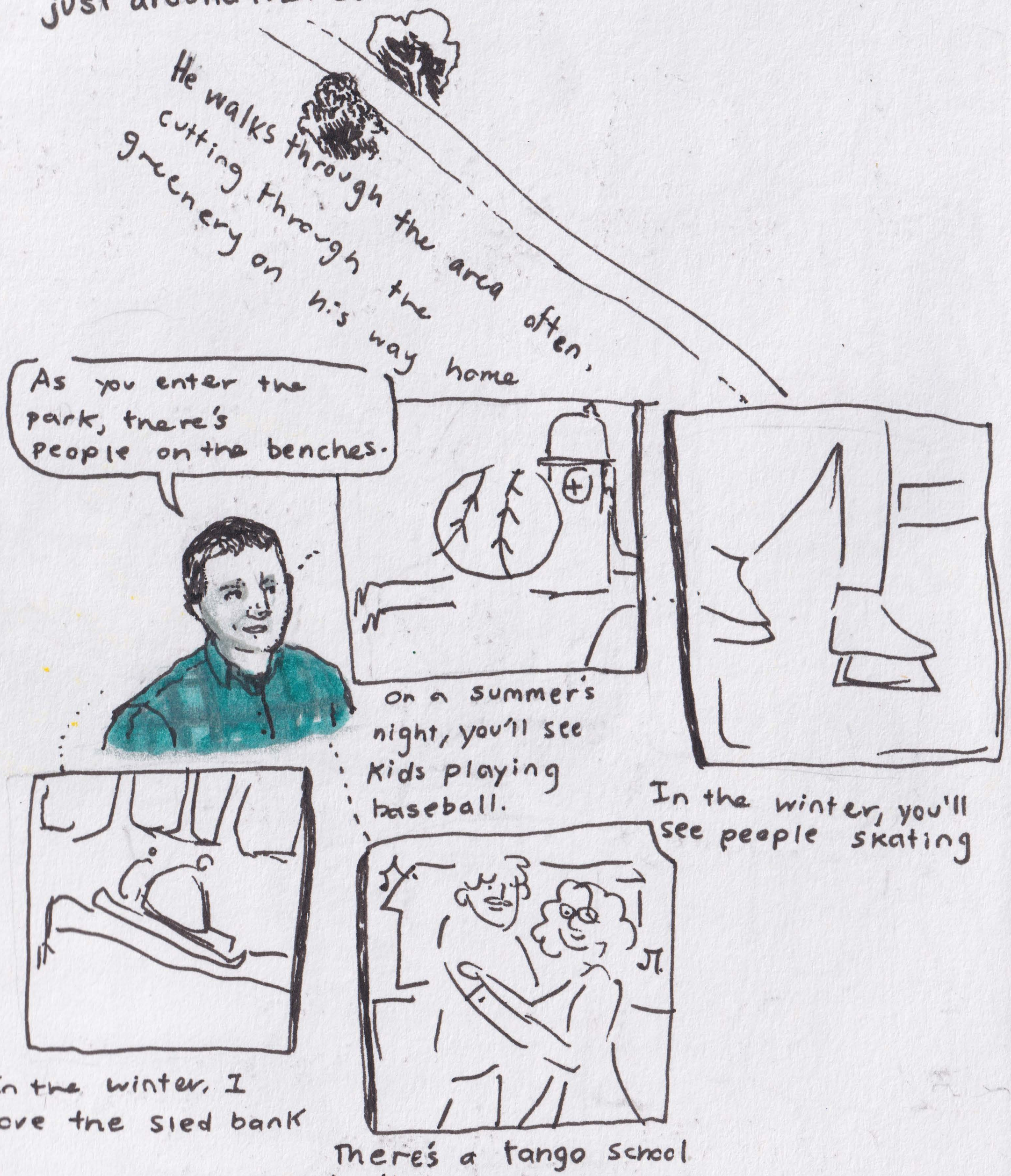
↳ Reference photos will be hard to find

↳ I hope all interviewees will be like JK

↳ JK is a private person; how do I respect it

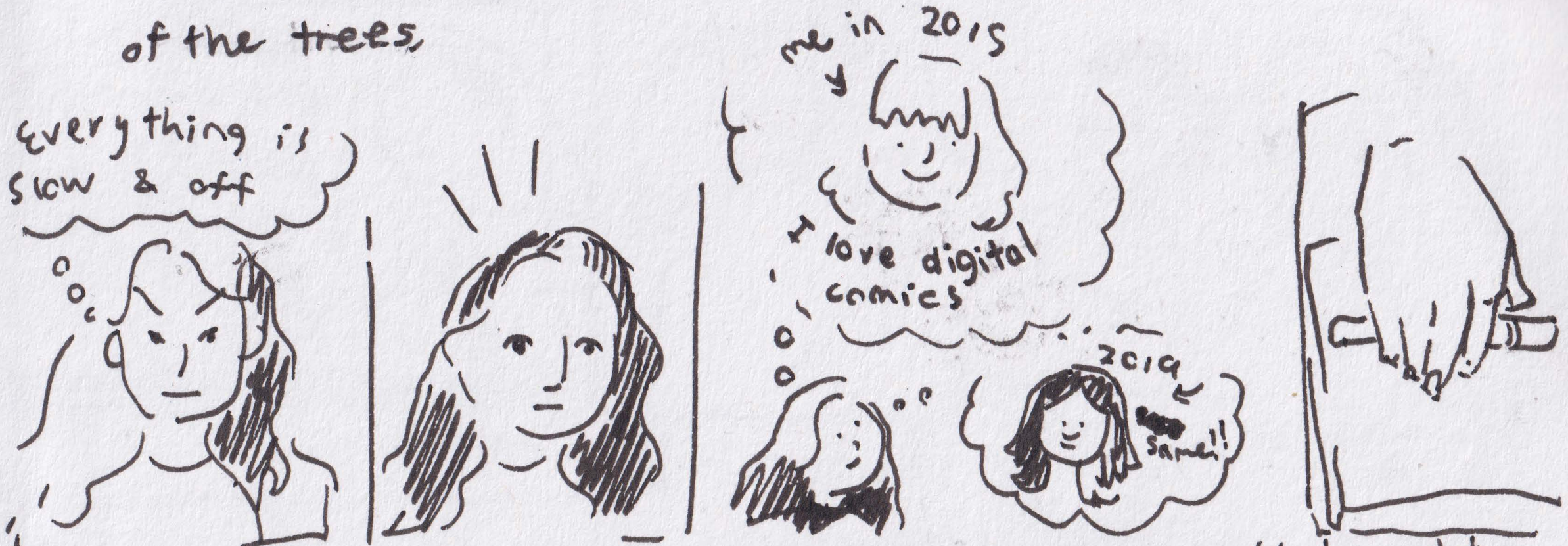
- starting the comic today!

Jeffrey Kastner has lived in NDG for 36.5 years, just around the corner from NDG park.



Then there's a lot of people hanging out in the summer.

Ever since the big storm of 2017, which destroyed so many of the trees,



it seems like as a part of the rebirth, it brought people back to the park.



For kastner, the park held reminders of his family



Drawing people who aren't me is so hard

SILVANO DE LA LLATA

Especially when there are so few references

& I feel weird looking up publicly available resources

Does this face truly exist?

Full transparency

I'm currently in a car in the middle of Iran (the central province)

But I'm also working on a comic & reflecting

highlight

transcript

yell

notebook

people have a lot of memories

First memory

clearest memory

Sad & 😢 at NDG Park

A sense of place is made up of many memories

Getting braces

Zombie

Nov 11th

when I began this project, I asked, what is your most significant memory from the park

but for someone who has lived here for years, that could be a more fluid question



JK had many memories tied together & B needed time to delve into his. N had many memories, but had narrowed down her most significant memorys



To JK →



NDG park is a social place

Even the process of going through memories can show a sense of place & its transformations.

& his memories prove that



with JK, his memories his as a collective built

NDG PARK

Firsts

→ first sunset

→ first visit

↓ first (almost) cry

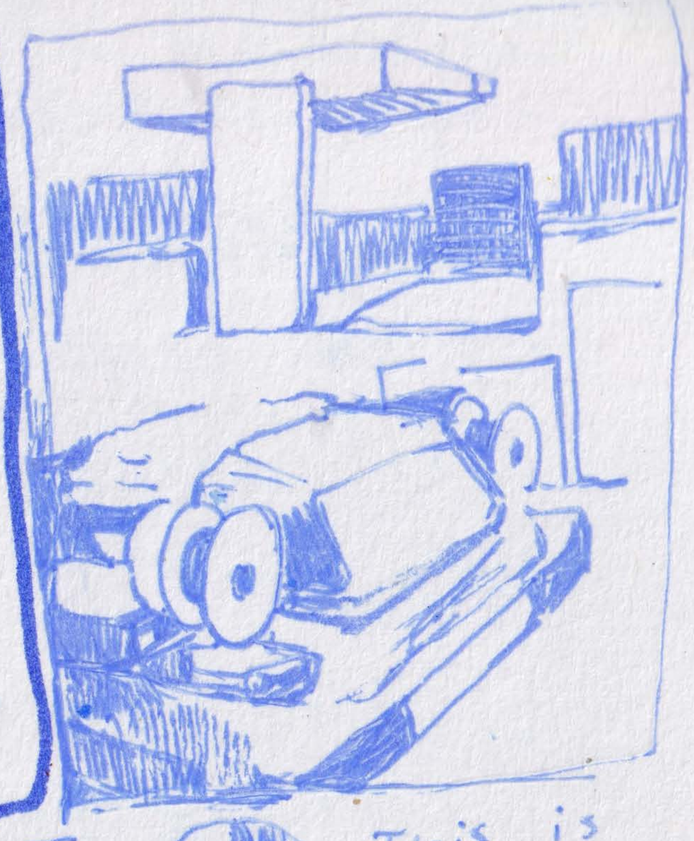
↓ first fight

↓

ooo

This feels like it's veering on the side of TMI!

Maybe Gilling?



The research process

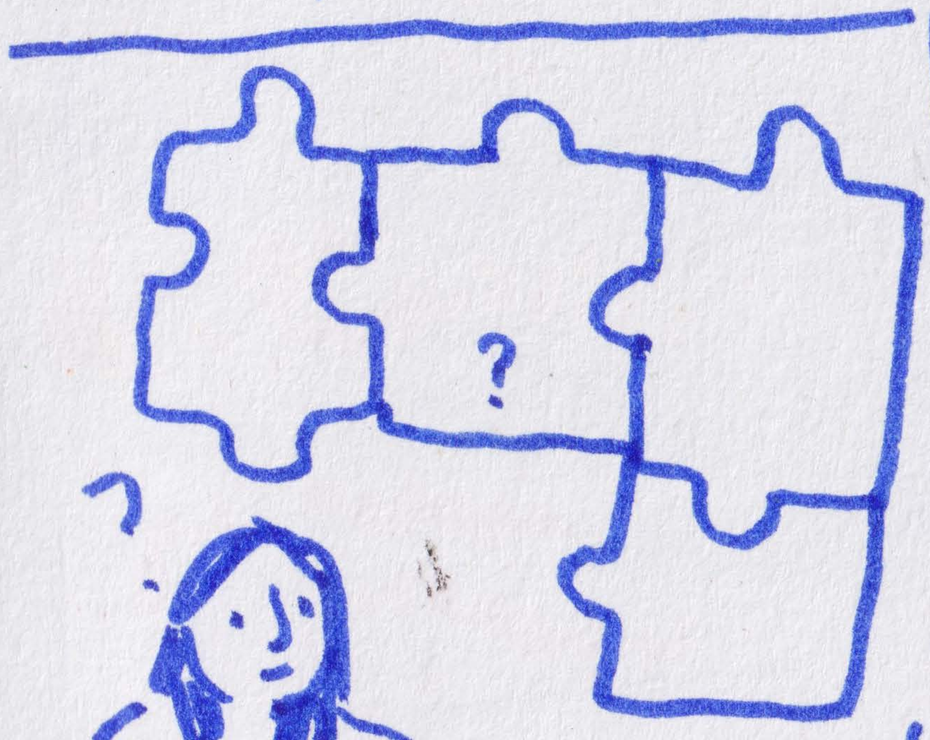


Everyday, I look at the same files & names



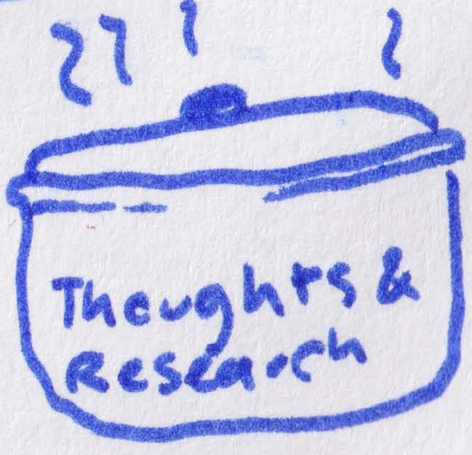






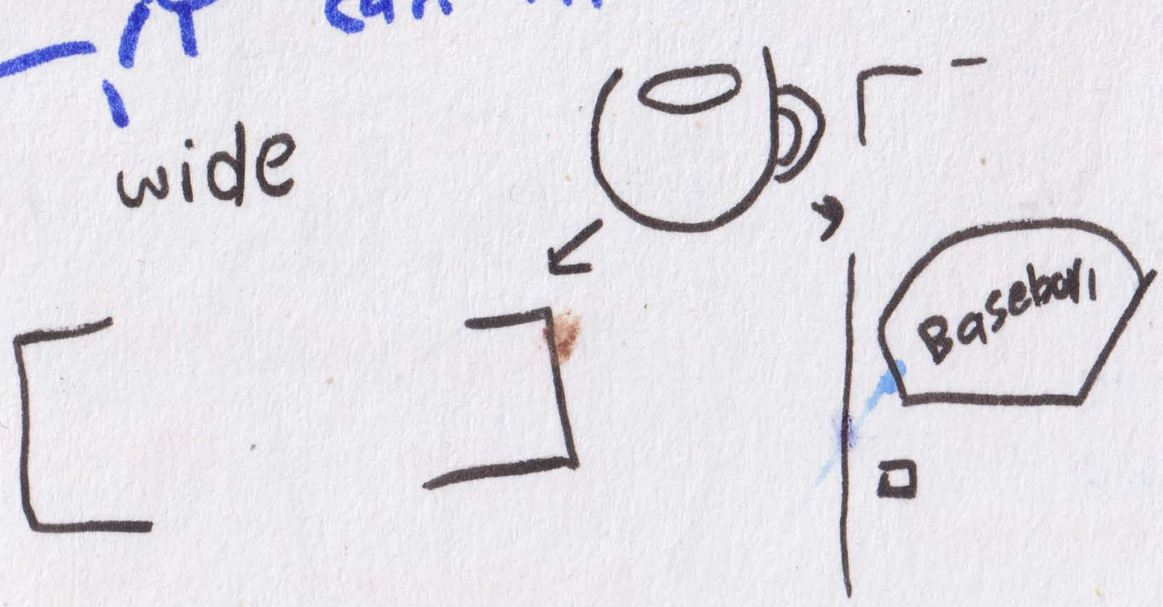


Success isn't very common

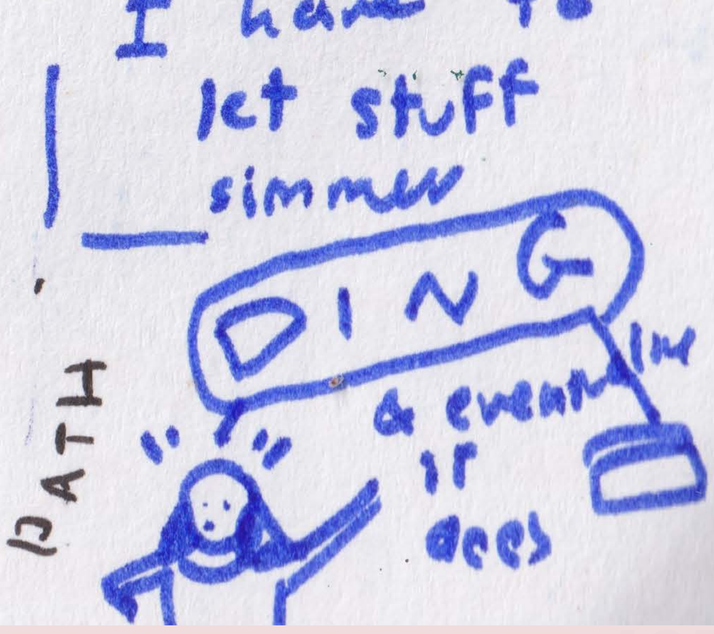


I think of how I can fit these stories together

wide



I have to let stuff simmer



Now that all my memory interviews are done, I can begin to really process it all.

Each interview truly varied from the other. Each perspective I heard differed but there were parallels. There's beauty it that. All participants found the process worked & highlighted trust. The park was a grounding anchor & a social space. They trusted me with their stories, & now I must place them in the greater realm of things. I actually think I can do that now ♥

Significant memories

- first visit
- Rendez Vous
- Braces + Fries
- C-S-A Skati →
- Mom
- Hydrangeas
- Zumba
- Run
- sunset
- walk home from classes (semesters)

↳ NOC vs Racism
↳ Hamilton
↳ Historic'l poster
↳ drawing
↳ Sunday @ Park st jrt

↳ Storm
↳ RC
↳ Camila before
↳ After

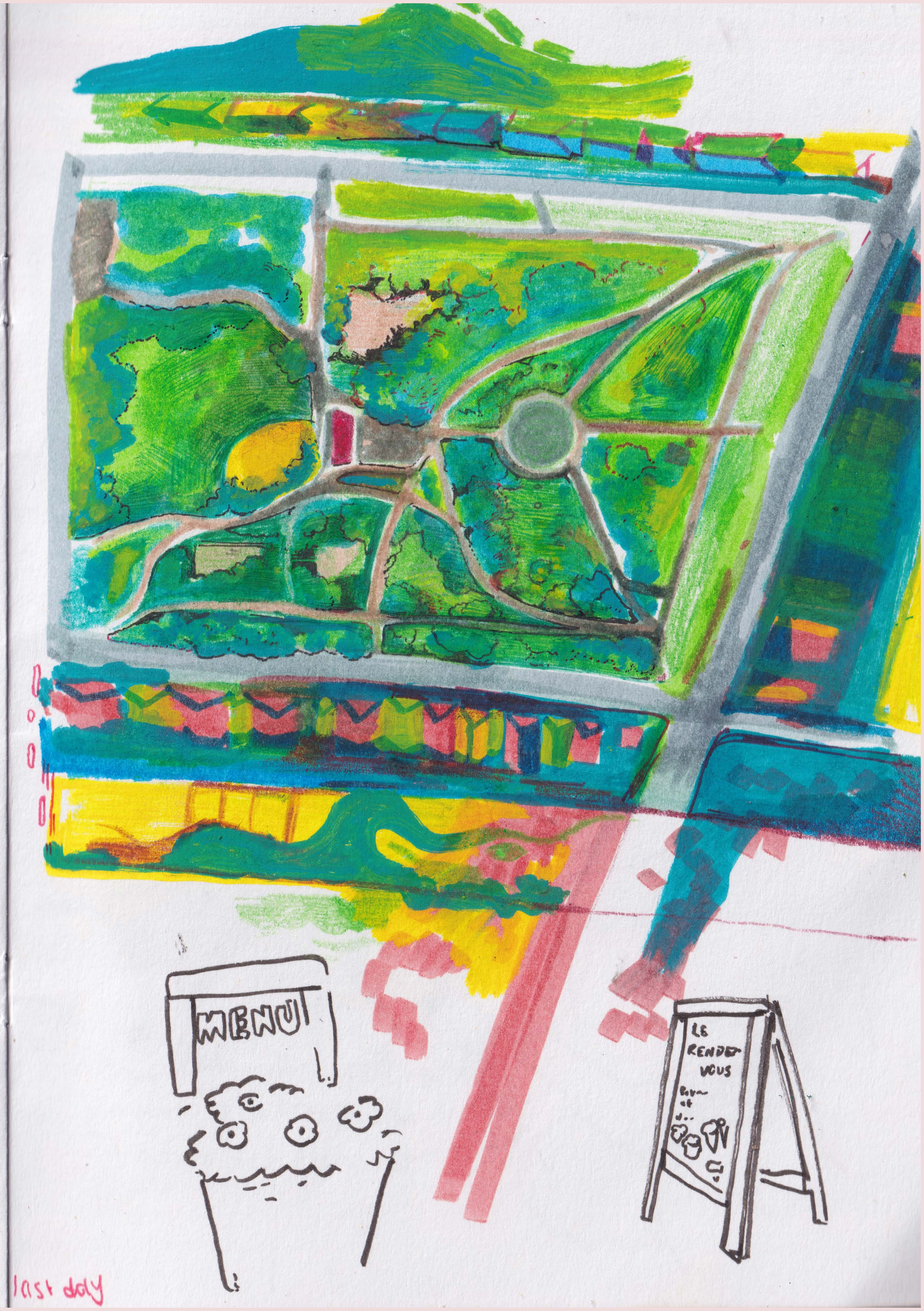
↳ Pavillion Silvano (cink)
↳ The NOC park that never was

Drawings

↳ Cover
↳ Sports & rec
↳ breakdancing
↳ Camila-1
↳ gen sports-1
↳ baseball
↳ hockey
↳ Jackie W
↳ Remembrance Day
↳ General
↳ RC
↳ Prince moments
↳ maybe infog

Rendez vous

↳ BK
↳ Jerome
↳ Sketches
↳ maybe over Painting on


MENU
LE RENDEZ-VOUS
last day

Hmm...
what would be interesting for a final guide.

Are these specific to illustrated journo?

286 trees in the park

First tree planted on oct 22nd 2018

213-205 between trees in the park after the storm

The invasive Norway maple

Here I was unsuccessfully trying to count the trees









If I interview more people, would I be able to illustrate a collective sense of place

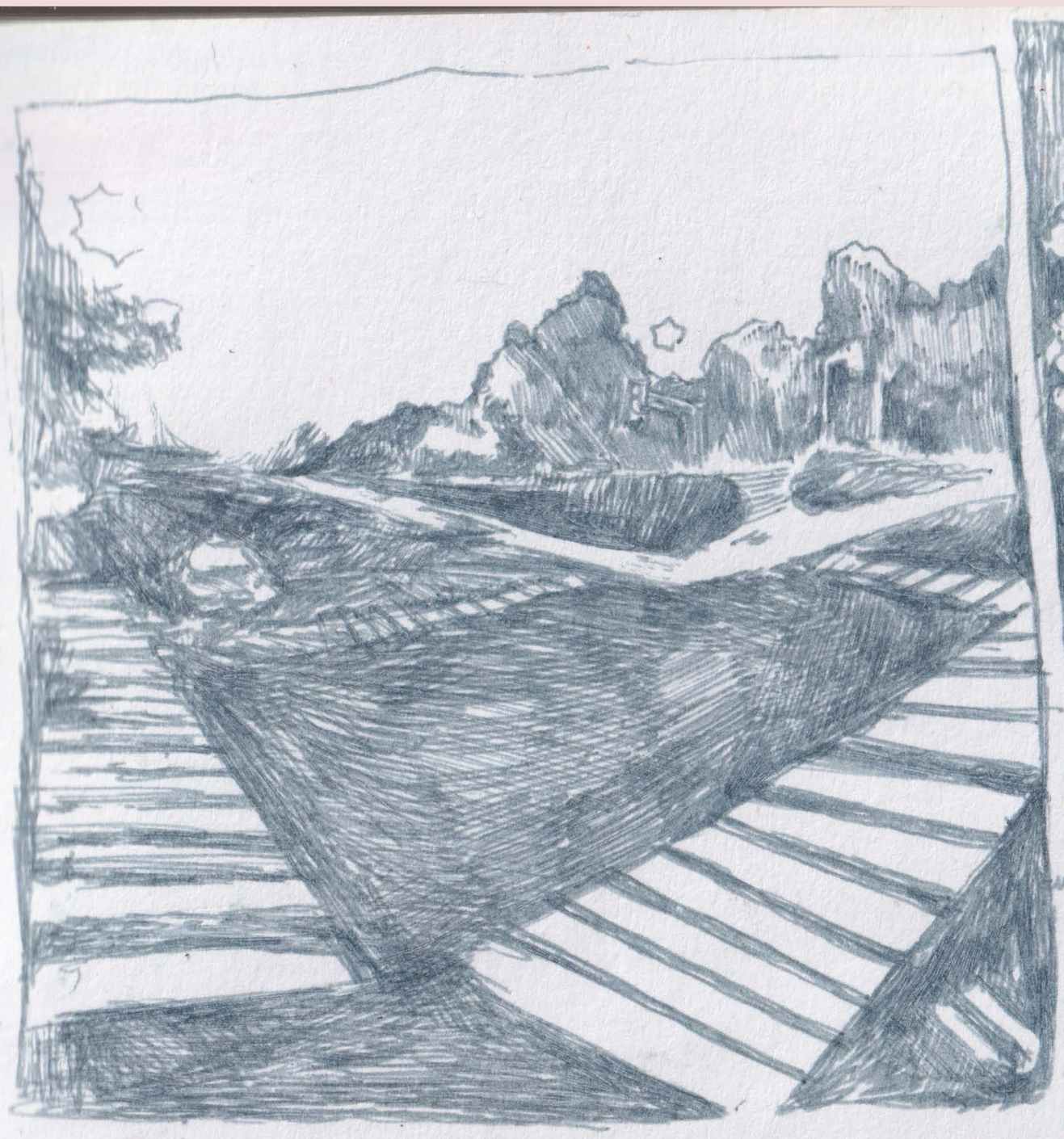
Sometimes, when someone tells me a memory,
I see it in my head as well.



Then, I begin imagining a variety of details; some of which don't exist. It makes me forget to ask follow-up questions.

Then, I begin to draw & realize I'm not exactly sure what I'm drawing.







Every evening, I'd walk past this intersection - crossing the park dressed in evening blues & navy.




This is for my thesis!






went to the first
Spoke to
Sue Montgomery
Jerôme
Glad
Brenda Kelly



① Almost Perth Ontario

working on my own memory comic

drawing from a photo

Hmm. I'm pretty sure I have a more detailed recollection of this





① Almost Perth Ontario

working on my own memory comic

drawing from a photo

Hmm. I'm pretty sure I ha a more detailed recollection of this memory

But I don't remember it

photos

DEPAN

There's a fine line between relying entirely on photos & using them to jog memory

when I keep looking only at reference photos, I seem to forget them

for me, at leas

St. Jean @ NDG Park,,

We cou be sit at a d little p

or, we co be sittin

Nicole told me about running at the park, so I had to try it myself :

You begin to realize just how uphill the park's slope is

When I run, I don't wear my glasses

huff huff huff

I see what Nicole meant now

UP HILL

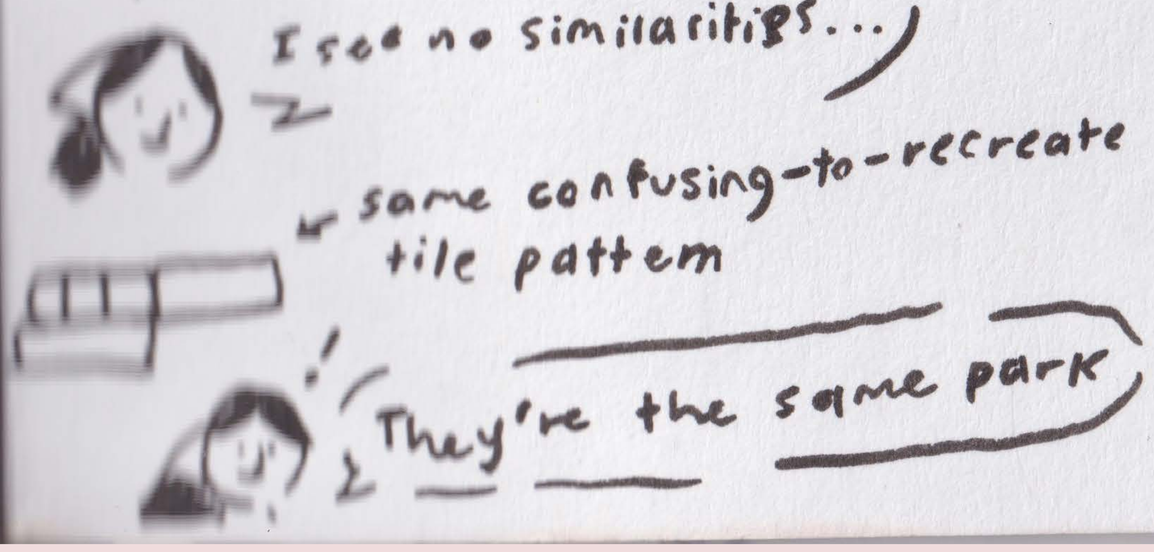


After the comics, my own attention to details has evolved. On my way home, I saw people playing Petanque for the first time & I stopped to watch.

Juin 24, (St. Jean Baptiste Day)
This morning, I'm both taking the holiday "off" & working (2 day) ← lies! I worked till 4 pm
Right now, I'm on my way to MLK park, what was previously Kent Park. A.K.A NOG park's twin. In the evening, I'll be at R-V @ NOG park.

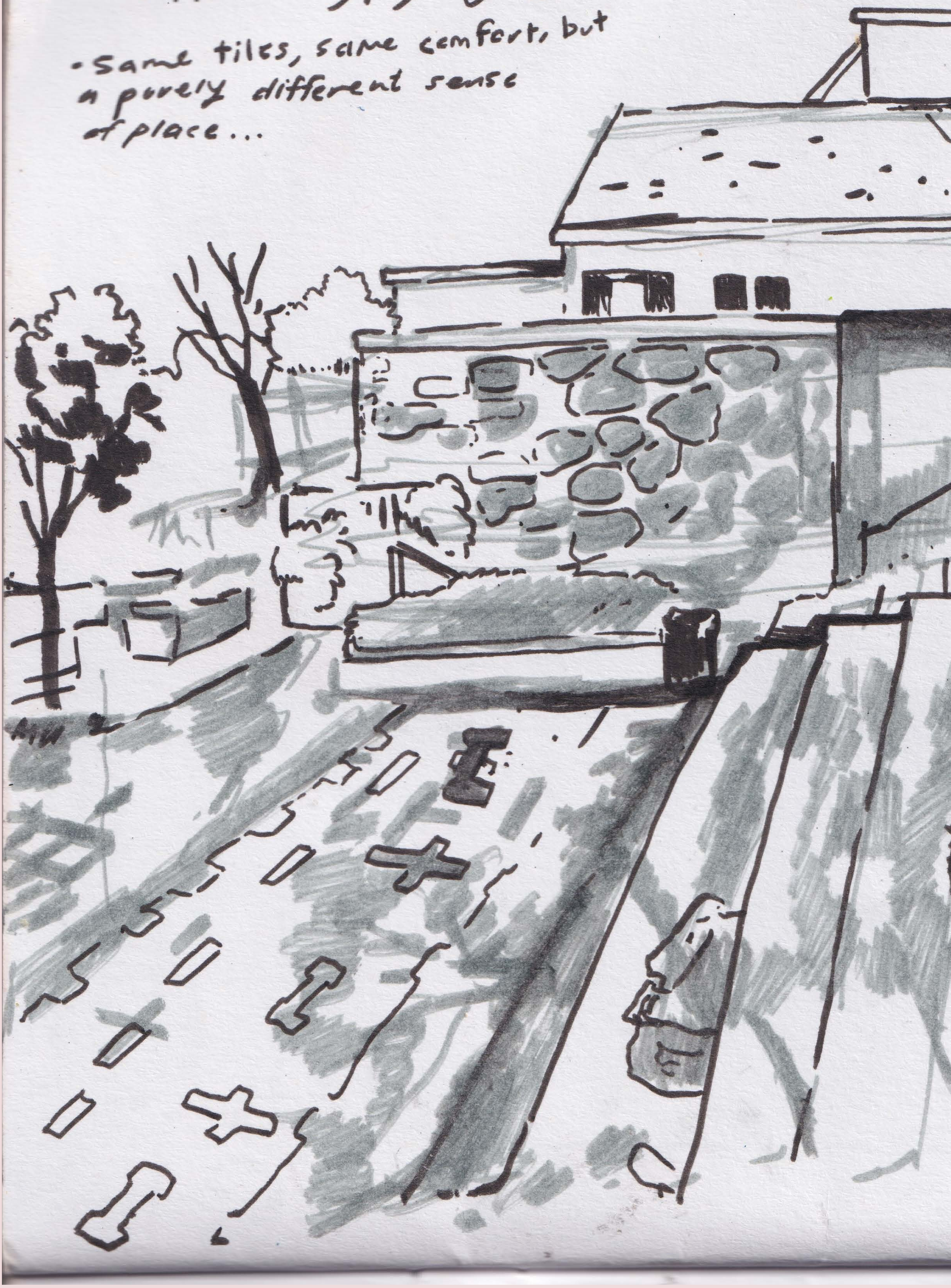
Are these steps unnecessary?
Yes, but they're important to me as a journalist & artist. I'm immersing myself in the subject. It's here that I feel like what I'm doing has a purpose & is tangible

Kent park thoughts



Place 375° Parc Martin Luther Kin

- Same tiles, same comfort, but a purely different sense of place...




A3 HELIO


dance!!



From the Archives!

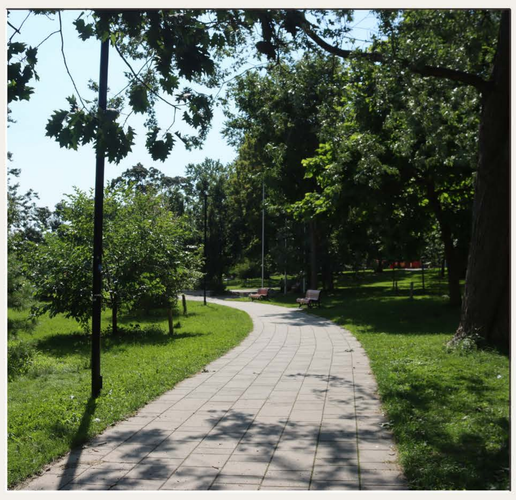


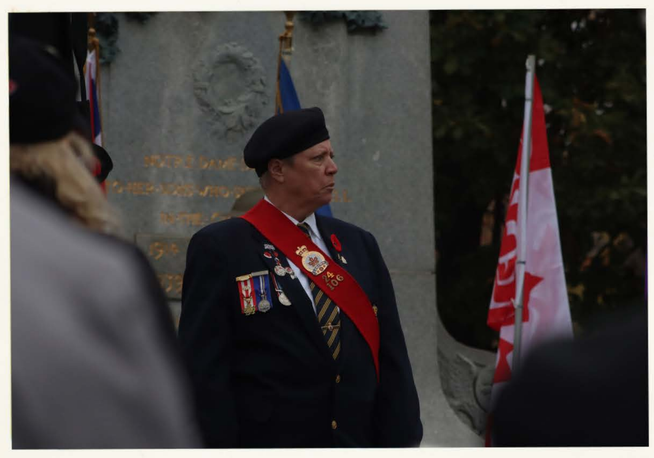

McGill
July 3rd
The next time
I'll be here,
this thesis
will be done
that's
bonkers

The last full thesis weekend

Some of the photos and references I took throughout this project for the illustrations and comics.







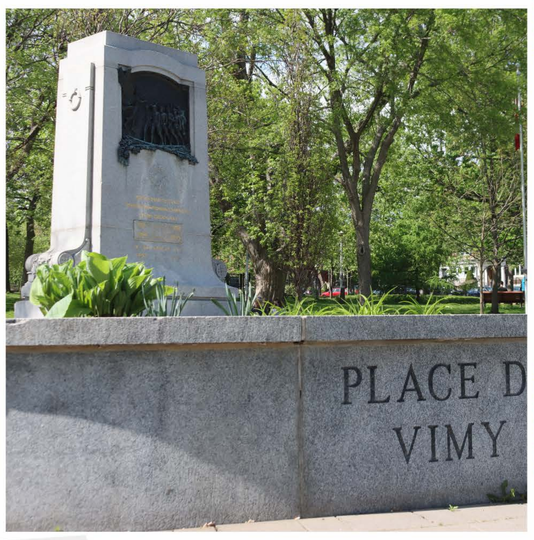


13



13 A

14



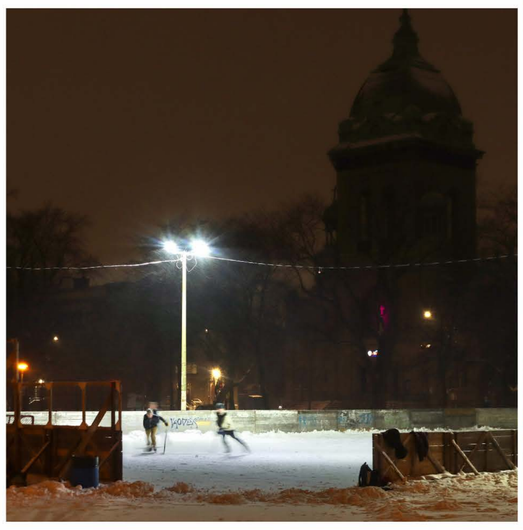
14 A

FILM NEGATIVE

13



13 A



14 A

FILM NEGATIVE



