



While I still lived in Montreal, as I was walking along Fairmont, I was handed a missing poster of Jolene Riendeau, a ten-year-old girl. I couldn't ignore its silent imperative, couldn't discard the page. So, I tacked it up on my wall, where it remains even though seven years have passed and I've moved three thousand miles from the place it was given to me. Now, another poster is beside it. One of Heather Thomas, who was about the same age as Jolene when she disappeared, but whose fate is known. She was murdered. For years now, these two pictures have been on my study wall. The girls pictured on these posters are smiling into rooms I cannot see. They were fixed this way in a moment long past. Throughout the process of writing my third novel, these representations were a daily reminder to me of what it means, day after day, to have disappeared. There are creases on one poster, tar marks and staples on the other. The images and expressions remain poignant even as the paper dulls and ages.

As a writer, it's part of my practice to be available to what's around me, to take it in and ruminate. But I'm a writer in Vancouver and what's around me is a particularly fraught space. This moment and this place have a larger context too: Thirty years ago, when I was still a child, I first saw a picture of a little boy in a red hat, a child who was terribly imperiled. The appearance of Adam Walsh¹ on my parent's television screen, the apparition of that small red cap, echoed a shift in the way Western culture had begun to think about children, childhood, and especially, about childhood endangered. In these last thirty years, there's been, if anything, an increase in public concern for imperiled and absented children, for

children who are represented as ciphers of nostalgia and innocence, and for children whose images flash across CNN in the days after they disappear from private worlds only to have their ersatz images appear in public ones.

So, I'm in Vancouver, a city situated on Coast Salish territories, and as I walk to the Sky Train, I see dailies with headlines about the trial now underway. I see discarded newspapers with pictures of women who've been going missing for years, disappearances that, for a long time, went unremarked in mainstream media. When I look closer, take in a detail, I see a woman who, even as she appears in the paper, disappears at the same time—so little of her is represented.

For years, though, I'd go into the prisons out here with Joint Effort, a community-based grassroots organization that operates in solidarity with women prisoners. There, from Lora McElhinney, I hear stories of a woman, since gone missing, who in BCCW (Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women, since closed) was a leader in The Native Sisterhood—and that's something you rarely if ever hear mentioned in the press about her. My partner, his sister-in-law's sister, is another of the women who is seen on the ubiquitous RCMP poster—and that poster only tells a terrible fraction of her story. She is pictured there, a cropped headshot, though when I look, I imagine the many pictures the RCMP might have used, ones that include her sister, for instance. I picture the pictures that might have come to be, the ones that would have included her niece and nephew, not yet born when she disappeared, and the ones that might have been taken at a family gathering, and might have included me at its edges, not yet "in the picture" at the time she disappeared.

1 Adam Walsh's disappearance and murder in 1981 was the subject of much media coverage. His abduction and death prompted the creation of the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, was the subject of a made for television film, *Adam*, and more recently, was retold in the *New York Times* bestselling book, *Tears of Rage*, by John Walsh, Adam's father, and host of *America's Most Wanted*.



On a summer's afternoon in 2002, Margot Leigh Butler and I walked on Dominion Avenue, to try and understand the scale of the loss. We placed flowers at the memorial and paused to read letters and pictures left by family members. I pointed out the picture of my partner's sister-in-law with her sister, left by her and my partner's niece. In silence, we took in the vulnerability of the impromptu memorials, ones left out in the elements, ones slowly being eroded by the wind and the rain. If I understood the scale, if I glimpsed it, it was not in walking the property's perimeter, or in seeing the mounds of dirt, some new, others flowered over, having already been processed by the team of forensic anthropologists. I think if I understood the scale of loss, it was when I saw what remained of a photo that had been carefully covered in saran wrap: The sun and rain had bled the colours away, leaving the bare lines of a girl's face, that was slowly disappearing in time.

In the summer of 2006, with Amber Dean, I attended one day of Robert William Pickton's pre-trial. In courtroom 102, bulletproof plastic separates the gallery from the court. The room was built so that I couldn't look at the back of the accused's head without seeing the reflection of a family member seated two rows behind. That complication, that palimpsest, struck me as important. It's one, too, that suggested itself as I was reading the pieces that form this collection. When reading these pieces, I saw, ghosted, the possible readings of family and friends of women who've gone missing, and readings of women who've been made vulnerable to violence, readings of women who might have read something in this issue, but now never will.

Like Amber, my experience of working on this issue has been one marked as much by a sense of hesitancy as necessity. It's part of a difficult conversation with threads that span over time and geographies. It's not a thread you want to pick up, but simply one you do, because what is around you is impossibly difficult and not to be ignored. As I think Amber will agree, we both have tried our best to pull together works that, in different ways, help us better understand what has happened in this city's thinking that so many women for so long could disappear, disappear from this city, and disappear (in whole or part) from the polis of public representations as well.

—Anne Stone