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### Finding Boomer Harding: An Autoethnography about History, Librarianship, and Reconnecting

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#### Recommended Citation

Jacobs, Heidi LM. (2017). Finding Boomer Harding: An Autoethnography about History, Librarianship, and Reconnecting. *The Self as Subject: Autoethnographic Research into Identity, Culture and Academic Librarianship*, edited by Anne-Marie Deitering, Robert Schroeder, and Richard Stoddart, 89-104. <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/leddylibrarypub/49>

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# Finding Boomer Harding

## An Autoethnography about History, Librarianship, and Reconnecting

*Heidi LM Jacobs*

I am remembering a day from early October 2001. It is one of those fall days you savour because you know winter is coming. My husband Dale and I are standing near the Detroit River in downtown Windsor listening to the speeches that precede the unveiling of two sculptures—one in Windsor, the other in Detroit—commemorating the Underground Railroad. The sculpture on the Windsor side is dedicated to those who sought freedom in this country, and it acknowledges the role Canada played to secure freedom for escaped slaves. The sculpture depicts two women tending a baby while a man stands behind them with arms held high as if in praise. I look across the river to Detroit. I am newly back in Canada after seven years in the United States, where I studied American literature and African American women's literature. I realize I know nothing about African Canadian history. The speeches wash over me. I am distracted by the third part of the sculpture: a little girl holding a doll and gazing over her shoulder, looking across the river at all she has left behind. The little girl seems to embody the history I do not know. It is overly simplistic, if not erroneous, to assume—as we so often do—that once crossing the river into Canada, former slaves would live lives of easy freedom and never look back. When the speeches are over, I take a closer look at the little girl and the look on her face stays with me for days. I think about the story she would tell.

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We have been living in Windsor for just over a year. As we were preparing to move to Windsor, I was finishing up an article about slave narratives and stumbled upon a reference to Windsor as a terminus on the Underground Railroad. Reading about the history of slavery in North America often reminds me of looking at American weather maps: movement of cold fronts and low pressure systems are meticulously charted across the United States yet, above the 49th parallel, Canada is a uniform blue colour, as if weather ceases to exist when you cross the border. When you look at books about slavery and African American history, history also seems to stop at the 49th parallel. Canada rarely makes the index.

I am teaching Women and Canadian Society at the University of Windsor at this time and I realize, like me, our students know very little about the history of the land upon which they study and live. I come to realize few of our students know about the role the river played in determining who is free and who is enslaved. The beginnings of ideas come to me and in the next weeks and months, a colleague and I develop a course called Women and the Underground Railroad. I would go on to teach it twice to first-year students, who became rapt by the subject matter and hungry to know more.

I am also remembering a day in January of 2004. I am midway through the second course of Women and the Underground Railroad. I have just made the difficult decision to leave academics and start my MLIS in the fall. I promise myself to somehow continue connecting students with this history, although I do not know how I might do this or if I will be able to remain in Windsor when I graduate. As it happens, I was hired at the University of Windsor's Leddy Library: I was grateful and thrilled. I remember my promise to myself about the Underground Railroad, but this promise fades under the realities of a busy and scattered life of an academic librarian. I never forget this promise, but I keep putting it off.

## June 2016

At Leddy Library, I am an Information Literacy librarian with liaison duties in English and history. Although my professional iden-

tity is firmly within librarianship, I know my background in literary history shapes the work I do in ways I do not always see. I write articles about teaching and pedagogy in libraries and why these things are important. Almost everything I write is deeply informed by Paulo Freire's ideas about praxis: "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it."<sup>1</sup> Recently I was reading a book by Kathleen Blake Yancey, who noted that many people who pursue English studies are drawn to the profession "in part to change the world through reading and writing,"<sup>2</sup> and I was certainly one of those people. Throughout my BA, MA and PhD in English, I firmly believed (and still believe) what Elizabeth Ammons has articulated so succinctly in *Brave New Words: How Literature Will Save the Planet*: the task of humanities teaching and scholarship is "to open young people's eyes to oppressive systems of human power, how they work, and how we are all involved in them. We expose the injustices and the ideologies driving them.... We help others see the importance of interrogating the bases of contemporary thought in order to understand destructive forces in the world today such as racism, environmental devastation and economic imperialism."<sup>3</sup> When I was teaching literature and women's studies, I felt I was doing some of this work—in small ways—almost every day. Since becoming a librarian, I feel like I've been doing much less of the work that was so vital and inspiring to me. When I let myself think about this lapse, it bothers me quite a bit. For a while, I tried not to think about these lapses. Increasingly, I've been bothered by how many times I've found myself "too busy" to do the professional work to change the world in whatever small or large ways I can. I make promises to do more to change the world but I keep thinking "maybe when I'm less busy." That time never comes.

## May 30, 2015

I am checking my e-mail instead of watching the preflight safety demonstration on a flight to a conference in Ottawa. I see an e-mail from my colleague Miriam Wright in history describing how she has just met Pat Harding, the daughter in law of Wilfred "Boomer" Harding (1915–1991). Mr. Harding, Miriam tells me, was an exceptionally gifted athlete in baseball, hockey, track and field, and many other

sports. Because he was a man of colour in the early twentieth century, the colour barrier severely limited where his talents could take him. Pat Harding has scrapbooks of articles, ephemera, and artifacts dating back to the 1920s and wondered if Miriam would be able to help her digitize them and make a website. Miriam asks if the library's new Centre for Digital Scholarship might be interested in working with these scrapbooks. In my quick skim, dormant passions are reignited and I know instantly that this is the kind of story that needs to be preserved and heard. I ignore the flight attendant's warning to power off my device and quickly text Miriam back: "YES! Count the library in!!" I spend the rest of the flight buzzing with excitement.

## August 13, 2015

Blake and Pat Harding—Boomer's son and daughter-in-law—are coming to the University to talk with us about the project. I am incredibly anxious all day. I go over our presentation a dozen times, overthinking every detail. Will they approve of what we have done and the mock-up of the website we developed for the archival collection. When we show them the website on the big screen in our board room, they are quiet. They are still quiet when we are done our presentation. Mrs. Harding breaks the silence saying, "When I look at what you have there and when I think about the kind of man Boomer was..." She pauses, trying to pick her words carefully. My heart drops into my stomach, and I fear she is displeased. When she resumes, she says, "I think he would have liked this very much. It's not flashy, and he would have liked those colours." My fears start to thaw, and we talk about our next steps. They tell us more stories. We're laughing. We propose working with the Chatham Sports Hall of Fame (where Boomer Harding was inducted in 2003) to get a seed grant from the province of Ontario's Trillium Foundation. We start to get things underway so we can apply for the January 2016 deadline.

When I arrive home from work late in the day, the August humidity is still heavy in the air. The cicadas are almost deafening, and my husband Dale is in the shade of our front porch reading. I set my book bag down on the empty chair, and he asks "How was your meeting?"

“I think my whole working life has led up to this afternoon, and I am speechlessly happy.” I let the cicadas fill the silence as we smile at each other. Dale understands exactly why I am happy. I tell him about the next steps for the project we’re calling “Race, Athletics and Courage in Chatham, ON: A Digital Archive of the Barrier Breaking Life of Wilfred ‘Boomer’ Harding.” We let the buzz of the cicadas and the gentle rustling of maple leaves usher in the evening.

## **December 9, 2015**

Miriam is in my office, and we are a few weeks ahead of the January deadline for the Trillium Foundation seed grant. Over the past four months, we have written, rewritten, reworked every line dozens and dozens of times. Don, from the Chatham Sports Hall of Fame, has gone over every detail with us with his enthusiastic and keen accountant’s eye and approved a final version. We have counted and recounted every word. We have just entered the final edits, and our eyes flit between my computer screen and each other. “Do we hit Submit?” I ask. Miriam says, “I think so.” We stand in silence for a few moments. I move the mouse over the Submit button, and I whisper to Miriam, “You press it.”

## **March 10, 2016**

It is the middle of March, and we should hear about the grant application in the next few weeks. I am feeling restless, anxious, distracted, and, I admit, a little cranky about it. In academics, you get used to waiting for things. You get used to disappointment. I’ve been through things like this many times before, but this one seems different and it is. In the fall, Miriam and I had coffee in the Hardings’ basement in Chatham, and I told them: “We will get funding. I promise you. If not this grant, we will find funding somewhere. This project will happen.” We cannot disappoint them. I’ve spent a lot of time thinking and writing about Boomer Harding over the past few months. I worry about disappointing him too.

I process what getting this grant can do. If we are successful, we can hire students to interview Boomer Harding’s family and descen-

dants of his baseball teammates, the Chatham Coloured All-Stars. The stories the Hardings have already told us are remarkable, and I know we must capture this vital, fragile history, save it, preserve it, share it. This grant means we can hire a teacher to write curriculum for K–12 students in our region so children will grow up knowing things about this region’s history that have gone unspoken for too long. We can have historic plaques made and installed so reminders of this history will be present. We can create a travelling exhibit to go to museums, schools, and libraries. If we are successful, people will know Boomer Harding’s name, and they will know his story. If successful, we can make good on the promises we made to the Harding family.

If we are unsuccessful... I try not to think about it. But we will try again. Other sources of funding would put us back a year. We could piece together a thousand dollars here, and a thousand dollars there. Miriam and I think we might be able to foot some expenses ourselves. We’ve become good at making a little go a long way. We could make this work. But barely.

My mind launches into the well-trod arguments about why this project should get funded. It animates community history. It makes connections in the communities. It does all the things these seed grants are intended to do. It’s a great project. I know it is futile to focus on con arguments, so I do something equally futile. I Google “Trillium Foundation apply for grant” to check our application status. My browser tells me, “You have visited this site many times.” I stare out my office window a bit and wonder if the river is still frozen. Spring really should be here by now.

## March 16, 2016

Still no word. Don, Miriam, and I check in with each other with increased frequency: did you hear anything yet? The nonflashing voice mail light on my phone seems to taunt me. Beside my computer is a picture of Boomer Harding. In a sepia-toned picture of a summer day, he is smiling a gentle, slightly mischievous smile and swinging a bat. I stand by my office window holding a cup of nearly cold coffee. It is monotonously grey and belligerently cold outside. If I look out

one edge of my window, I can see Detroit. The Tigers home opener is a week away, and the trees outside my office cling to their leaf buds protectively. The idea of baseball seems incongruous with the view outside my window. I stare at Boomer's picture some more and decide to go for a walk along the river.

At the edge of campus, at the base of Patricia Street, I stand at the banks of the Detroit River. I look north to Detroit and mentally orient myself to where the old Tigers Stadium once stood and where a public ball field is maintained by a group of dedicated volunteers. When the weather is nice, you often see pickup games of baseball. The wind today, however, is blowing so hard that there are whitecaps on the river and I am the only person walking along the banks. Just me and some paired-off ducks. I watch how the waves toss the little duck couples indifferently and note how they seem to have surrendered to the will of the river, and, in spite of the weather, they seem fairly content. I stare at a particularly stunning mallard, and I imagine him saying, "You know, there's not much to be done about the things you can't control." There's a lesson there. I smile at the mallard and walk back to my office. I put the grant out of my mind. Sort of.

## March 30, 2016

There's a small lull in my schedule, and I find myself with a day without meetings. I take this opportunity to try and catch up on reading. I pull Sara Ahmed's book *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* off my shelf along with Donn Rogosin's *Invisible Men: Life in Baseball's Negro Leagues* and print off some of the digitized files from the Harding scrapbooks.<sup>4</sup> Although Ahmed's book ostensibly has nothing to do with libraries, I see connections everywhere to the library as an institution and as a part of broader university communities. I am also seeing connections between Ahmed and my baseball research. I am reminded of ideas and words that should inform all the things we do in libraries: "If we do things with words, then words can also do things to us. We don't always know what they will do."<sup>5</sup> These words run through my head for a while.

Somehow these important, big ideas—no matter how important

we believe them to be—get lost amidst the details of the everyday. I'm finding these ideas even harder to consider in my one-year term as Acting Associate University Librarian. This week, we've been troubleshooting issues with our ILS, contemplating e-resource cancellations and how we might manage the inevitable backlash on campus, dealing with newly rekeyed doors with locks that do not work and angry librarians who are unable to get into their offices. We are wondering what next year's new budget formula will mean for us, strategizing about the pending retirement of key personnel and the likelihood of being able to replace them. Today we notice a Canada goose is laying eggs in a very precarious place on our rooftop. I can see the goose from my office, and she looks happy in her nest. When I ask, "Why can't we just let the chicks stay?" my query is met with silent shudders. I am told, "You don't want to know." I leave it there. I probably don't want to know. There are some things library school doesn't prepare you for.

Going between Ahmed's book, the baseball book, and the Harding documents, I come upon Sara Ahmed's point that, "The research process is a process of estrangement, which creates an orientation in which some things come into view that had previously been obscured."<sup>6</sup> At the end of April, I am speaking with a group of health librarians about librarian research culture, and I make a note of this quotation, thinking it could come in handy. As I write these lines in my notebook, I am drawn to this idea about estrangement and obfuscation. Sara Ahmed's entire book forces me into this space of constructive estrangement from my institution and the idea of an Institution. Estrangement from what we know, what we do, what we think we know, and what we think we believe is an uncomfortable feeling, but it is, I realize, urgent that we seek out spaces in which we can engage with those feelings of estrangement. Estrangement brings to light all of the things that have been obscured over time due to the demands to deal with the day-to-day and the complacency that we often fall into as a way of coping with those never-ending demands.

## April 6, 2016

We finally hear that we received the grant at 7:00 p.m. Miriam

and I happen to be at an event together when we get an e-mail from Don. I send the Hardings a typo-ridden e-mail. Mrs. Harding replies with the subject line, “I can hardly believe.” It begins, “Heidi, we are over the moon.... Boomer would be so pleased.” I get teary reading it. The next day I call the Harding house and talk with Blake, and he is ecstatic. Miriam gets an e-mail from Pat, who describes how she was telling friends about the project and the grant and became overcome with emotion. Nothing in my career has ever come close to this moment. I feel a level of responsibility for this project I’ve never felt with my work before. This feels like the biggest thing I’ve ever done.

## **April 11, 2016**

Spring still seems elusive, but there are forecasts of warm sunny days in the week to come. One of the things we realize we need to do is recreate team rosters for the years 1932–1939. Using box scores, team photos, newspaper articles, and interviews, I start to piece things together. I start to know the players by face, I know what positions they play, I read accounts of games so concisely detailed I can recreate plays in my head. In a few hours, I feel like I’ve watched the whole season. I start cheering for them inning by inning, becoming disappointed in losses and missed opportunities. The more I read, the more I become a fan. I develop affection and admiration for the team, and I start to get a sense of personalities. It’s not unlike what I do as a Tigers fan at the beginning of every season. About ten years ago, the Detroit Tigers had a “Who’s Your Tiger” promotion and I answered “Curtis Granderson.” I still wear a Granderson jersey and T-shirt, he’s still my Tiger. If I could, I’d buy a Boomer Harding T-shirt. He’s my All-Star.

## **April 15, 2015**

It is finally a sunny spring day, and I have a rare meeting-less morning. I’m filled with hope, wonder, and possibility. I sit down to read an interview with King Terrell, who had played third base for the Chatham Coloured All-Stars. New sunshine pours into my office, and I stumble across these words: “We beat West Lorne and they run us

out. They run us out of the town. They had clubs and hoes and rakes and everything else and we just got everything all packed up before the game was over, cause we knew there was something going to happen anyway.”

I read the words again.

“They run us out of the town.”

Again, I read.

“They had clubs and hoes and rakes and everything else.”

“We beat West Lorne and they run us out.”

I feel physically ill. All the emotions the first spring sunshine brought have now vanished. My stomach is turning, and there’s a lump in my throat. I leave the office because I know I could not explain to anyone who might walk in what I’m feeling right now. I walk to the river and sit at a bench until the nausea and tears subside. This project has suddenly become much more powerful and real and devastating, and I am not sure why.

I try to “academic-ize” my feelings to try and make sense of them. I tell myself that I shouldn’t have been surprised by any of this, having read, studied, and taught African American literary history. None of this should be new. I knew what happened back then. Another part of me timidly asks, “But if you knew what happened, why does it seem so shocking?” I start to question my own knowledge. Did I really know what happened? Is it so devastating because these events happened here, in Canada, not across the river in the United States? I find myself continually circling back to the team pictures I’d studied so carefully over the past few weeks. These were the men chased out of West Lorne with clubs and hoes and rakes. Just as the Underground Railroad became devastatingly real for me the moment I looked at the statue of the little girl and her doll, meeting of the gazes of the Chatham Coloured All-Stars in the photographs has made their history alive in ways I could not have predicted. I know I need to confront and accept the fact that people in a community 140 kilometers away from where I’m sitting right now came after Boomer Harding—the man in the picture above my computer and the father

of kind and gentle Blake. And they came after him with clubs, hoes, and rakes and everything else and ran him and his teammates out of town. And not nameless teammates, but Earl “Flat” Chase and Don Tabron and King Terrell. They were run out of town for the simple act of scoring more runs in a baseball game than a team of white men.

I go back to my office and finish reading the interview and stare some more at the team picture. Over lunch, I again retreat to the river for a walk. I am still puzzled by my shock at reading about these events. I realize this morning was so powerful because I heard the history of the Chatham Coloured All-Stars from their own voices and heard the history of my country from voices I have not heard before.

Reading the interview with King Terrell leaves me rattled and confused. I wonder if this is the “process of estrangement” Ahmed was describing. I have meetings in the afternoon, and I try to push these thoughts aside. I have little success in keeping my mind focused on the meetings I am in, and I am impatient with the agenda items and the discussions that follow. None of it seems to matter. I want to go back to the Chatham Coloured All-Stars.

## April 19, 2016

I am in my office a bit earlier than usual and it is very quiet. The interview with King Terrell is sitting at the top of what I think of as my “deal with” pile of paper. Easier said than done. I stare out my window, noticing the goose is back. I feel I should warn her that bad things will happen if she nests there, but I’m still not sure what those bad things are or how to warn her. I reread the King Terrell interview and look back up at the picture of Boomer Harding. The section about West Lorne still feels raw but this time I get caught up in a section where the interviewer, Boomer’s sister Wanda Harding Milburn, describes going to a Chatham Coloured All-Stars game in another town and having racist words thrown at her by children: “Some kids were calling us names and throwing apple cores and stones at us.” The description ends with her saying, “They ran us out of Bothwell too.” I repeat “children” in my mind over and over again.

Every day I see how the story of the Chatham Coloured All-Stars isn't just a story about baseball or the colour barrier in sports. In trying to preserve and bring this story out of the archives, we are talking about the team but also those around them. It's a story about men and women confronting and negotiating the non-codified yet still very real segregation in Canada and in sports. It's also about women like Wanda Harding Millburn. And women like Boomer Harding's mother, wife, and daughter-in-law, who so carefully and diligently clipped and preserved, organized, and protected these newspaper clippings. It's about the actions of Pat Harding, who found ways to make this story known through first nominating Boomer Harding to the Chatham Sports Hall of Fame and then approaching Miriam about digitizing the documents. This story is getting bigger every day. For me, this project is getting bigger than digitizing artifacts and putting them on a website.

Staring out my window, I remind myself that geographically and temporally, the West Lorne and Bothwell events really aren't very far away. Possibly some of those children may still be living, and in the Windsor-Essex Chatham Kent area. This wasn't a story about somewhere else, like Montgomery, Alabama, or Greensboro, North Carolina. This is a story about here.

My convictions that the stories of Boomer Harding and the Chatham Coloured All-Stars and their families need to be told, preserved, and shared have never wavered from the first moment I heard about them. I am also highly aware that I cannot tell this story: I cannot speak for those who were there. What I can do is use my "available means" to help their voices be heard and preserved. Still, I feel some discomfort that I know I cannot ignore. And I know precisely where this discomfort comes from.

Prior to becoming a librarian, I taught English and women's studies, and it was there that my earliest commitments to finding and preserving the stories of those overlooked by history or silenced because of their race, gender, ethnicity, class, or sexuality first took root. One course I often taught was African American women writers. The issue of me—a white woman—teaching such a course was invariably and understandably raised. When I first taught the course as a graduate

student and a new teacher, I was anxious that I would be asked, “What authority do you have to teach this course?” I was anxious because I knew my answer would be “absolutely none.” I avoided addressing that question the entire semester: I felt equally uncomfortable about raising it and ignoring it. The question, of course, emerged in course evaluations: “Why is a white woman teaching this?” “Aren’t there black women who could teach this course?” I had incredibly supportive mentoring as a new teacher at the University of Nebraska, and all my questions about my qualifications were addressed with suggested readings and lots of discussions about self-reflexivity and reflectiveness in teaching. As I taught the course at other institutions, I began to integrate this question into my teaching because I realized a parallel question existed in my predominantly white students’ minds: can we read and respond to this literature as white readers? As we talked through this question all semester, students began to consider what would happen if we extended this logic so that we were “qualified” to teach and read books only by people just like us. Or what would happen, for example, if there weren’t any First Nations teachers available to teach First Nations literature? Would it get taught? Or should a First Nations scholar teach only First Nations literature? What if their passion was Restoration drama: Would they not be qualified to teach something other than First Nations literature? What kind of learning environment or world would that be if we read and taught only books by and about people just like us? There are—absolutely—no easy answers to these questions, but I’m not convinced we need to pin down answers. I think instead we need to ask ourselves, each other, and our students these difficult questions about what we do, the work we believe in, and the positions we occupy. Once we start feeling comfortable and complacent, we need to start asking questions again.

When I became a librarian, I believe I thought I wouldn’t have to address these questions any longer. I was diligent about representing a range of literatures, voices, and histories in the books I purchased and made sure that my information literacy classes showed the diversity of the literary and historical world through examples I would use or resources I would highlight. Working with the Harding Project has reminded me that the questions that I erroneously and naively thought I was leaving behind when I left English studies are equally

vital and imperative for librarianship. But these questions rarely get addressed in our profession and more and more I feel compelled to raise them.

As a profession, we like to think of ourselves as neutral. Perhaps in an ideal sense, neutrality is a stance that embodies a well-informed understanding of multiple issues and balancing of perspectives. Often, however, a stance of neutrality is a justification for passivity, indifference, or ambivalence. Neutrality can be something we can hide behind as librarians as a way of avoiding issues or avoiding taking a stand. When I taught English, my students and I demanded of each other that we be aware of the positions we occupy in our society and how those positions inform how we see the world and ourselves in the world. As librarians, we're seldom required to acknowledge our positionalities or consider how who we are shapes the work we do and why we do it.

Disturbingly, the world of academic librarianship can appear to move along in such a way that many of us can avoid these difficult questions altogether. Or perhaps our work is structured in such a way that the day-to-day exigencies get prioritized over these difficult, unanswerable questions. As a profession, we like to give answers. And we like to ask questions that give us answers. Often, we are not comfortable asking questions that only raise more questions.

Here, I want to return to Sara Ahmed's point about researching being a process of estrangement. I'm not convinced this point has to do only with research. I think it also has to do with how we choose to exist in our professional lives. It *is* disorienting and uncomfortable to be estranged from what we know and how we know what we know. But that discomfort results in us being able to see things anew and afresh. It lets us create, as Ahmed writes, "an orientation in which some things come into view that had previously been obscured."<sup>7</sup> Learning about Boomer Harding, King Terrell, Wanda Harding Milburn, to name just a few, does create such an orientation. It is uncomfortable to have what we know or think we know about our history, our region disrupted. But it is vital that we are able to see the things that have been obscured by time and history, not to mention our own positionalities. And we need to ensure that voices once muted or silenced by history are heard and preserved.

## June 2016

It's funny how sometimes our lives come full circle when we least expect it. My first knowledge of Windsor was through a reference in a book to a terminus on Underground Railroad, and for several years I've been wondering how I, as a librarian, would get back to doing something to help connect students and members of the public with that history. Last week I read a quick biographical entry on Fergie Jenkins, Jr., whose father, Fergie Jenkins, Sr., played for the Chatham Coloured All-Stars. I read that Fergie Sr.'s mother was a descendent of American slaves who escaped to Canada via the Underground Railroad. The Chatham Coloured All-Stars, then, are part of that narrative. Yesterday I learned that Bill Henson, another player on the All-Stars, is descended from Josiah Henson, believed to be the inspiration for Uncle Tom in Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous 1854 novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, so there is another connection. And Willie Shagonosh, also on the team, was described in a 1938 newspaper article as "a long, tall Indian from Walpole Island in Ontario." The Chatham Coloured All-Stars story also tells other forgotten, overlooked stories: the story of our region's First Nations people.

In rereading this narrative, I am struck by how often, quite unconsciously, the Detroit River appears in my writing. The river's edge is a five-minute walk from my office, so perhaps it is logical that it appears so often. But this river is a special place for history and for reflection. The University of Windsor sits on and is surrounded by land that was part of the Three Fires Confederacy and inhabited by the Anishinabe, Pottawatomi, and Odawa—groups now living at Walpole Island. The river would have been at the centre of their lives. This river was literally and figuratively a fluid border, but in the nineteenth century, it could determine who was free and who was enslaved. Maybe it's not a coincidence that so much of my thinking about this project has happened while staring at the Detroit River. It is more than just a river. And this project is more than just a baseball story. It is a story of our nation.

As Kathleen Yancy noted, some of us are drawn to English studies because we believe in the power of the written and spoken word to change the world. Becoming an English and history librarian has not lessened that belief for me at all; rather, it has bolstered it. I now see

preservation of and access to words and history as one of the chief ways in which we can share and build a greater understanding of the world and, in so doing, try to make it a better place.

*I would like to thank Anne-Marie Deitering and Bob Schroeder for their incisive and insightful edits on this piece. I would especially like to thank Pat and Blake Harding for introducing us to Boomer and for all the kindness, support, generosity, love, and trust they have shown us.*

## Notes

1. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary edition (New York; London: Continuum, 2006), 51.
2. Kathleen Blake Yancey, *Teaching Literature as Reflective Practice* (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2004), ix.
3. Elizabeth Ammons, *Brave New Words* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), 11–12.
4. Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); Donn Rogosin, *Invisible Men* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).
5. Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 75.
6. *Ibid.*, 10.
7. *Ibid.*

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