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ALL ON BOARD
Terrace Bay, Ont.
Cassidy McLean

As told to OLIVIA LEVESQUE

to water from spending days boating and fishing with my family.

A couple of years ago, I moved back home and really noticed surfing was a growing sport; the idea of surfing on the Great Lakes was something I didn't know we could do in our corner of the country. But it seemed so male dominated to me, and the frigid cold and the force of the lake were intimidating.

Once COVID hit, I was looking for an outlet. I saw a lot more women getting involved with surfing, and that was really my push into it. I was so drawn to how powerful this community looked on the lake. I was craving a connection to the land and the community that was growing in front of me. So I slipped into a wetsuit, got on a surfboard and ventured out to get to know the water and the tides in a whole new way.

The first couple of times, there was a lot of frustration. When you see other people surfing, it kind of looks simple. In reality though, when you first try it yourself, you get barrelled all of the time. We're talking sand, sometimes snow, in your face and water in your mouth. I did have this "aha moment" a couple months in. That first time you get up on a wave and have the perfect surf line is the most magical experience of your life, and that's when it becomes an obsession.

I definitely wear many hats as a mother and a nurse, but when I get in the water and get surfing, everything else shuts off. It's where I can find a bit of release and quiet through this complicated time, where it's just me and the water.

I'M REALLY FORTUNATE to have grown up in Terrace Bay; it's a little hidden gem in Northern Ontario, situated on the north shore of Lake Superior. I've always felt like I have a special connection

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WHAT A TRIP
Cold Lake, Alta.
Kelly-Anne Riess

TO DISTRACT MYSELF from isolation—after my husband, a military pilot, deployed during the pandemic—I sought virtual adventure, walking what equated to the English Channel's width from my home in northern Alberta.

I borrowed the idea from my Grade 8 teacher, who had our class run the 7,821-kilometre distance of the Trans-Canada Highway. Three times weekly, we jogged around a lake across from our school, our distances tallied and marked out along a classroom map. Completing that project wasn't important. It was the process I enjoyed, mentally ticking off each lamppost I ran past.

Twenty-six years later, I use phone apps to track my kilometres. I enjoy walking, but I need a goal to go regularly. I gave myself two weeks to complete the 34-kilometre Channel crossing.

To supplement my hikes, I explored tourist sites online, and read articles about other Channel crossings, including one about a 16-year-old girl from New Hampshire who recently spent 14 hours swimming across it.

Excitedly, I shared achieving my goal online, prompting conversations with friends I haven't seen in months because of COVID-19 restrictions.

After I completed the Channel crossing, I treaded through woods near my house to emulate the 42-kilometre Inca Trail in Peru. At night, I read travel blogs about altitude sickness experienced by trekkers walking to Machu Picchu.

Amazed at how quickly the miles added up, after the Inca Trail, I tackled the 135-kilometre Hadrian's Wall in England, built by Romans to protect their empire.

By coincidence, a friend was walking Spain's Camino de Santiago from Lethbridge, Alta. He added me to an online group of others around the world doing similar challenges—another Inca Trail traveller made her excursion circling her backyard while locked down. A 90-year-old woman climbed 12,388 feet, a mock hike up Japan's Mount Fuji, using her stairs. An Ontarian, undergoing cancer treatments, struggled with each kilometre but completed a 1,000-kilometre "Icelandic expedition." Our posts inspire and encourage one another.

Now addicted to virtual travelling, I'm currently working on the 805-kilometre Camino myself. After, I'll do Italy's 500-kilometre St. Francis Way.

I never thought walking alone in my neighbourhood would connect me to the world.



RIESS PHOTO: KELLY-ANNE RIESS; PHAM PHOTO: MIKE MANIS



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DOING THE TRICK
Toronto
Elly Pham

As told to SAIRA PEESKER

JUST BEFORE the first lockdown last March, during a Muay Thai sparring session, I was punched in the face so hard that my orbital floor broke and I suffered double vision and a concussion. That traumatized me. I needed a new hobby. I was seeing a lot of roller skaters on Instagram, so I bought skates.

The first time I drove to the skate park, I sat in the car for a long time. I really had to push myself to go in. Inside, an older man was just ripping around the bowl. I kept thinking, "Is he going to be looking at me and be like, 'What is she doing?'"

I got over that fear. Now when I go to the skate park, I don't care who's around.

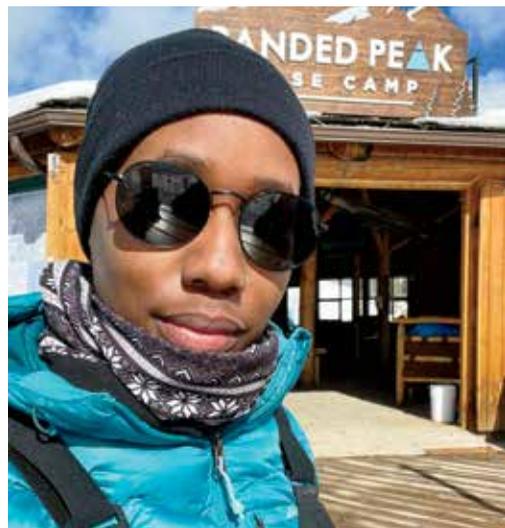
I was a 100 percent beginner at the park, but my experience rollerblading and ice-skating definitely helped me. I also went roller skating daily for an hour and a half while my one-year-old son, Jaden, was napping, so I progressed quickly.

My biggest success with a

trick has been the backside stall, where you go up to the coping [the rounded lip at the top of the ramp] and land a 180-degree turn. It took me two months. There's something about hurting myself on the coping, especially shin-on-coping, that really scares me. I kept trying it step by step. I watched a lot of videos on YouTube and footage of myself attempting the trick. A big part of it was just committing, but when I got it, oh my gosh, it was liberating. There's just something about that feeling of getting over a fear. And after landing a trick like that, it opens up so many more doors to tricks I can do.

I'm now pregnant and I'm still skating. I worry about people judging me, especially now that my belly is showing, but I know my body best.

I also know that this time to skate is time I need so I can be 100 percent mentally there for Jaden—and, eventually, for my new baby, too—outside of the skate park.



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JOY RIDE
Calgary
Déjà Leonard

STRAPPING ON MY SNOWBOARD bindings for the first time in 10 years evoked many of the same feelings I was grappling with nearly a year into a global pandemic: fear, uncertainty and a "I guess let's see what happens" type attitude.

While I anticipated a fall or two, I didn't expect to be reminded so deeply of my teenage years, when I first tried the sport. With every turn I made down the mountain, my confidence grew and I began to remember the feeling of freedom that snowboarding

had once brought to my exuberant, optimistic teen self. During a time when finding happiness and hope was hard, the sense of joy I was suddenly experiencing was unsuppressible, and it sure felt good.

So much had changed since I had snowboarded last: I have a real adult job, I bought my first home and I started playing the drums again. But one thing hadn't: I was very much still one of the only (if not *the only*) Black person on the mountain.

Realizing how much of a privilege it is to show up and feel like you belong—when I'm constantly reminded that I don't—can be lonely. But it can also feel empowering. When society is not creating space for me, I'm still showing up and taking it anyway.

SURFING PHOTO: KENDRA GIRWOOD; LEONARD PHOTO: DÉJÀ LEONARD.