

During the few times I visited Vancouver, I could have been waiting for a bus with Clifford Olsen and commented about how depressing the city's weather could be. And I'd continue talking and looking up at the mountains and say to him how just doing that, being in the presence of those life-size paintings, erases these blahs every time.

Maybe I met Mom Boucher. At Ikea. We might have both been complaining about how they often don't have in stock what we came for. I'd be happy with how well I can break down barriers and talk to anyone.

Could Marc Lepine have been that guy I would regularly speak with on the 55 bus at 7:12, on my way to the factory job, in '84? He just sat there and I sat there bleary eyed. But sometimes small talk would make that long bus ride to Chabanel go by quickly.

Could I have sat next to Karla Homolka during a Shakespeare-in-the-park performance last summer, my knee brushing against hers once?

Did I speak to Kimveer Gill in a coffee line-up? Maybe it was when the crowd was trying to topple the statue of Saddam Hussein. And we both talked and kept looking up at the TV at the Italian social club, sharing a giggle as we watched the dictator hang on by his tailbone.

I don't want to know that the guy who I just gave directions to bludgeoned his long-time girlfriend with a bowling trophy. I want to continue believing that we are all in the same story. Where the guy who played chess in a park was *not* the guy who carried the heavy gym bag into a university, a school where the cop later had to tear down Christmas decorations in the cafeteria. Can't he stay that guy in the park?

Please don't let the violence I read about escape from that paper and punch me in the head.

I want to stay in this privileged world where I have not been a victim of violence. But I also don't want to believe a killer is waiting by every bush. We do need to trust this world. And, also, know that there are some dangerous lurkers.

I need to remember that I do know violence. Just because I don't want to see it does not mean I don't know about it. I have seen it too close to me, in childhoods of people close to me whose heads were hit against the inside of the door they wanted to leave.

Craziness has lived too close to me. It's lived in me. I have felt blind rage and have been in other worlds. Just without guns or knives. Same basic ingredients. One thing left out and the cake never rose.

The murderer believed there was a plot against him that involved food poisoning and Barry Manilow music. The killer's lack of logic speaks to our own lost days, even if he

said his victims were nothing but whores, while for us it was stopping at a tub of ice cream.

The guy we read about went crazy, a killer crazy, after his ex-girlfriend began to date, saying he would always love her. Despite the fact he had just killed her.

What set him off? I could set him off. Did I just insult him? I take it back. I didn't mean that. He's pissed. There's no turning back. He'd feel good punching me. He would really feel better. Right away. Smacking me would actually calm him down. He'd feel worse later. If he was caught by the authorities or his conscience. If.

But he'd feel good right now to beat the shit out of me. To draw blood. To have me cry.

But I really didn't want to talk about violence. Not about your violence, my violence, the familiar and the strange I really want nothing to do with graphic images, angry retribution, calls for tougher sentences, pepper spray in purses and baseball bats by the door.

I don't like this anger. But that won't do anything about it, will it?

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Don't make me talk about violence, even the violence taking place right at this moment. I cannot think about it in one group, one tortured face at a time. I have a hard time looking simply at what's taken place even just in this last decade, in this country alone.

Do I need to remind you about the violence? Is it being reminded of it that's going to help us deal with it or heal from it?

I bury my head in one of my story deadlines. Working out your sentence structures can muffle a full-on imagining of a victim's pain. I drink up the latest phase my four-year-old is taking on. It's stuffing a big bag with about a hundred small little pieces of toys and kids costume jewellery and dragging it around the house. I talk to a neighbour about nothing much on one of those long afternoons of the summer that you find out at nine p.m. were really early evening. We just talk. And it's nice.

Do I have to wait until I am one of those who are fighting mad about violence? Will that make me look at it? Do I need to wait until I am appearing in public, on the road to rehab and activism, with bullet fragments still lodged in a part of the brain too risky to operate on? Will I believe it's real then and not just something that happens in a dodgy part of the city?

I know I should be helping those people stop the violence. How can they do it all themselves? He's got a bullet in his brain, for god's sakes. I've got a planter's wart.

The enemy does need taking on because he or she is madder and doesn't even know it. They think they're doing good when they finally teach a lesson. Setting fire to that house, the house whose layout they had been trying to keep from fading in their memory.

These people are on their marks, have a good defence and are ready with a sucker punch. I have to speak against those people. But what do I say? Stop? How do you fight violence? How do you fight insane rage? How do you even recognize it until it's done its damage?

Would you have recognized the killer before he struck?