

DEDICATION

Driven Reporter, Exceptional Friend

Why we're dedicating our book to Yusra Javed

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WITH REPORTING FROM CATHERINE ABES

I STARTED JOURNALISM SCHOOL in the fall of 2016. I was bright-eyed but timid, just out of high school. When I entered the Ryerson University School of Journalism, I found myself among like-minded peers for the first time. We were all keen, a cohort of eager, budding reporters; our collective energy was intoxicating. There was one other thing: I was, for the first time, in the company of young, driven women of colour with whom I identified.

In this mix was one particularly noticeable woman—Yusra Javed. We had even more in common as residents of the Durham region and children of immigrant parents from Bangladesh. Many immigrant parents hope their children will pursue more “respectable” and stable careers as doctors, lawyers, or engineers. But our parents supported our dreams despite knowing that signing up to be a journalist could mean a lifetime of struggle with modest paychecks and the constant pressure to be on the next story. I like to think we chose this profession not only to excel as journalists but also to prove ourselves in a Canadian industry that desperately needs diversity. Mired in the business of putting the public's interest on the record, we recognize how our inclusion in the newsroom will benefit our communities.

We lost Yusra at the beginning of our final year at the RSJ. We struggled to process her loss, knowing she was ready to accomplish so much as a journalist. From those who were closest to her to those who'd simply had the luck of crossing her path in j-school, we *knew* that Yusra would amaze.

But beyond being a stellar emerging journalist, Yusra was a unique kind of friend: in spite of her multiple commitments, juggling more jobs than anyone could guess, she still made the time to check in with others. She was loving, fiercely protective, and celebrated the success of her peers just as much as her own. As her closest friend, Sherina Harris, writes in *The Eyeopener*: “My favourite thing about Yus, something I always told her I admired, was how she could make anyone she was talking to feel like the most special person in the world. No matter what was going on in her own life, she wanted to hear about our joys, our worries, our stories.”

Yusra was a skilled reporter with an enormous sense of empathy. Our editorial team at the *RRJ* attempted to pen a memorial note when Yusra slipped from our

grasp in September but we found it difficult, even impossible, to find the right words, lost as we were in our own grief. How could we turn to others for their words? How could we, after we had bristled when reporters writing obituaries came to us in search of anecdotes and reactions? Talking about Yusra in the past tense was just too hard.

Months later, still healing and able to reflect, we can now talk about her. At the *RRJ*, our greatest takeaway is to endeavour to be as empathetic and kind as Yusra was: to reconcile the drive to find the story with the wisdom and heart to value the lives of the people whose stories we tell. As Yusra did. It's no surprise that soon after she died, a Queen's Park Press Gallery scholarship in Yusra's name quickly surpassed its \$5,000 goal and currently sits at over \$18,000.

“I hope we can all resolve to do more of what Yus did so effortlessly: go out of our way to make other people feel welcome and important and valued,” writes Sherina.

We do too.

I am glad that I had the good fortune to meet her. I will carry a part of her with me as I make my way into the industry.

Our book this year looks at how the past informs the future. We will carry what we have learned about the industry as we move forward into a new decade, one that poses great challenges for the practice of journalism. We're fortunate that, as we do so, we can hold the memory of Yusra's tenacity, empathy, and kindness close to us. **▣**

