

I Don't Know How To Tell You This

I got my first big magazine feature...



[Brianna Bell](#)

Nov 09, 2024

Throw away the idea,

That healing is forgetting

- Yung Pueblo

I didn't know I was good at investigative journalism until a year ago. It was like a part of myself cracked open and exposed a hidden longing buried deep. Journalism – yes; but arduous investigating and all of the blood, sweat, and tears that go into it? I'd never really pictured that for myself.

Over the last year I have been investigating the very Christian sect my family has been in for nearly a century. Because I work full-time in the corporate world, I have to fit this part of my work into the nooks and crannies of my day.

These types of investigations typically take months and months of work – for a single, typically 2,000-word article. What do those months look like, though?

A paragraph about what investigative work looks like

It's long phone calls with beautiful brave survivors and advocates, bearing witness to deeply painful stories told by incredible and strong people. It's emails to helpful experts, back-and-forth, back-and-forth, about seemingly mundane details. It's writing and re-writing, and then crying and re-writing again. It's (virtually) attending court appearances. It's pouring over court documents. It's calls and more calls, and then, a few more calls. And it's also a lot of sitting and waiting. It's hoping that the piece is good. That it's meaningful. That people read it. That editors want more of it. And that you can handle whatever the response is – because once it's out in the world, there's really nothing more you can do.

The secret I've been keeping

For the last six months, I have been working on a piece for a Canadian magazine called [Chatelaine](#). The physical magazine is out in Ontario now, and will be available across Canada by Monday. Next week, I'll send an email with a virtual link to the full piece.

For now, here's a bit of a sneak peek (If you're in Canada you can also access this article through [PressReader](#) or [Libby](#), use your library card and you should be able to virtually read the newspaper for free!)

“Finally, We’re Being Heard”

For decades, members of an ultra-secretive Christian sect in Canada experienced abuse at the hands of those in power. Now, they’re telling their stories—and I’m telling mine, too.

WRITTEN BY Brianna Bell PHOTOGRAPHY BY Alicia Wynter

I had my first panic attack inside a massive white tent while surrounded by hundreds of members of a church with no name.

A bead of sweat dripped down my back. I was 17, and my red flip phone was hidden in the pocket of the shawl that covered my bare shoulders. The preacher droned on about salvation and deliverance from damnation. My father sat beside me in a full suit, seemingly unaffected by the summer humidity. On the other side of me, my grandmother nodded her head, meeting my eyes briefly and willing me to soak up the preacher’s words. I could feel my heartbeat in my throat, like a hummingbird fighting to get free. “I am not good enough,” I thought. If I didn’t follow the church’s teachings, I was destined to spend eternity in hell.

A breeze rustled the tent slightly, and I noticed a gap in the fabric—just large enough for a small person to squeeze through. My chest felt tight and my vision blurred. I lunged toward the gap and quickly crawled through the hole, nudging my hips until I was freed from the stifling tent. I didn’t look back, afraid I’d catch a shadow of disappointment on my father’s or grandmother’s face.



Editor's note: This story contains descriptions of childhood sexual abuse.

As you can see, this is a combination of personal storytelling woven with the stories of three other Canadian survivors who shared their stories with me. I am honoured to be a part of sharing their stories – and while I cannot control the reception, I am already feeling the lightness associated with telling the truth and being open and honest about the pain of living.

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