Western Magazine Awards Foundation

The Magazine School TMS 2011

Bringing outstanding writing, design and photography to the classroom

Western Magazine Awards Foundation

- An annual awards program recognizing excellence in Western Canadian editorial work and design.

- The Magazine School TMS 2011 is a project of the Western Magazine Awards Foundation. It provides classroom material to instructors and professors.

The Western Magazine Award

Best Article – Alberta/N.W.T.

Finalists

- Marcello DiCintio, Fatherhood, *Alberta Views*
- Chris Koentges, The Campaign in Full Sentences, *Swerve*
- Tyee Bridge, Chinatown, *Swerve*
- Lauren McKeon, The Dragon and the Polar Bear, *Up Here Business*
- Thomas Wharton, The Romantics, *Westworld Alberta*

And the winner is:

The Campaign in Full Sentences

Chris Koentges

Swerve

Swerve

- "Resonant, relevant and relentlessly local . . . *Swerve* is Calgary's weekly conversation starter."
- Published by Postmedia Network
- Circulation: 110,000 in Friday's *Calgary Herald*, plus 5,000 copies free distribution

Click here for *Swerve* website

- Graduate of the University of Calgary
- Published in *Swerve*, *Reader's Digest, The Walrus* and *The Globe and Mail*
- Contributed radio documentaries to CBC's *Ideas*
- Occasional contributor to *Very Ethnic* blog

Author: Chris Koentges on salt flats in Bolivia

Click here for Very Ethnic blog

Story evolution – *Swerve*'s perspective

"It turned out that the 2010 civic election was the most interesting conversation Calgarians have had, I think, since I've been in Calgary, since 2004.

"Swerve had to be part of that conversation."

– *Shelley Youngblut,* Swerve *editor-in-chief*

Naheed Nenshi shakes things up

- Associate Professor, Mount Royal University
- BComm, University of Calgary, president of the students' union
- Master's degree in public policy from Harvard University
- Finished fourth in aldermanic race for Calgary City Council in 2004
- Columnist for the *Calgary Herald*

Calgary's 2010 mayoral race

- Three-term Calgary mayor Dave Bronconnier decides not to run.

- Three-term alderman Ric McIver was considered the likely successor.

> "Most important – and this can't be overstated – McIver had been the perceived frontrunner since February."

Nenshi wants a good candidate

Nenshi wanted to build a slate of intelligent people to run for city council. Many opted out of that, and the mayoral race.

"They fight too much. It's unglamorous. There's a huge pay cut."

Ric McIver: The frontrunner

“While McIver had support from federal Conservatives, he also seemed to be beholden to forces that did not necessarily have the best interests of Calgary in mind. He couldn't question the chief. He couldn't campaign at a Pride Parade. He was seen to be fighting for the freedom of private developers to build new communities any way they wanted. The tragedy of Ric McIver is that, deep down, he doesn't seem to be that guy.”

A challenge to McIver

- Barb Higgins, news anchor at CTV Calgary for two decades, enters the race to become Calgary's mayor.

Koentges dismisses Barb Higgins

"What had initially made Barb Higgins so attractive as a candidate was that she'd existed, night in, night out, for years in our living rooms.

"Politics in full sentences means that you, the citizen, must talk back. In contrast, the unspoken message throughout the Higgins campaign was: Barb is appearing at a certain location – come meet Barb. It was traditional, passive one-way dialogue, a candidate talking at us."

Author is with Nenshi in Vancouver

Vancouver Olympics: Feb. 24, 2010

"After the hockey game ended in a 7-3 Canada victory, Nenshi asked the folks around the table who they wanted as mayor. 'That guy' – meaning Nenshi – 'could be the next mayor of Calgary,' someone said. There was a round of dismissive laughter – the expats were smug in their belief that Calgarians would never vote for an articulate, righteous, brown guy."

The campaign becomes a race

When the Nenshi campaign started it was mocked for polling at one per cent. But a poll released after Thanksgiving suggested that McIver, Higgins and Nenshi were in a dead heat.

"Full Sentences" evolves

"Because we're a weekly magazine, we can assign things really quickly. We can be very close to the edge of the news. In this instance, as the poll results came out and as the momentum kept building, and as the conversation got more and more interesting, I was in touch with Chris. I know his interest in politics; I knew that he was involved on an inside level with a lot of the people who ended up on the Nenshi campaign."

– Shelley Youngblut

Nenshi becomes a frontrunner

"As the campaign got more and more heated, and the polls narrowed, this was going to be a three-way race. I said to Chris, 'I don't care if he wins or if he loses, it's an interesting story. It's a story Calgarians are engaged in; we need to do something.'"

– Shelley Youngblut

"As we were piecing together what might happen, we would trade our little bits of intelligence, and it became increasingly apparent that he had a really good chance."

– Chris Koentges

The writer knew Naheed Nenshi

"He's a guy I've encountered many times over the years, and would even have breakfast with every couple of months just to see what was going on. I knew who he was and where he came from. I think I had some really important context and had been hoping to write the story to come out before the election when it would make more of a difference to the outcome."

– *Chris Koentges*

Gaining access

"Because I had a relationship with certain people on the campaign, I started by asking for an interview. And then, well, maybe I could hang out for a bit; then the hanging out for a bit turned into, well, I just never left."

– *Chris Koentges*

Swerve commits

"If anybody was going to tell the Nenshi story it was us, and we were going to do it in such a way that it was honest. And that's where you can have all these aspirations and desires, but you need a writer who can pull it off. And this is where Chris comes in.

"He [Koentges] is an authentic observer. He had been observing all along but not sure what he would make of it."

– Shelley Youngblut

What Nenshi stood for

Nenshi ran on a "Better Ideas for a Better Calgary" platform.

> "What excited a lot of people on the campaign was that they didn't have a candidate from the left or the right, and it's what frustrated so many outsiders because they were trying to push him to be one thing or another."
>
> – *Chris Koentges*

The title emerges

"The Campaign in Full Sentences"

Chima Kemdirim, Nenshi's campaign manager, said the campaign strategy – "running on reams of detailed information" – and central theme – "politics in full sentences" – was borrowed from Don Iveson, who ran successfully for alderman in Edmonton three years before.

The story emerges – the print deck

"Inside the final three days of the campaign that changed the definition of what our city can be. Naheed Nenshi's team – more defined by its adeptness at winging it than by its purple T-shirts and ties – bet on a Calgary that doesn't exist . . . yet. It was a substantial bet. It was an audacious bet. And today, it remains a collective bet."

Alternate deck

Koentges convinced *Swerve* editor-in-chief Shelley Youngblut to publish his final filed draft, complete with alternate deck, on the *Swerve* website:

> "Their rivals bet on a Calgary that existed one second in the past. They bet on a place that existed one second from now. Their campaign seemingly came out of nowhere."

Click here for online story

Writer Chris Koentges covers the Nenshi story

Covering Nenshi's last 48 hours

"Chris picked up [*Swerve* photographer] Randy and drove Nenshi around that last weekend. And so we had complete access . . . And you had Randy in the backseat taking video of Naheed on his cell phone, which we were able to post on swervecalgary.com. It's completely unfiltered access."

– Shelley Youngblut

Click here for video

Writing the story

"Then it became a challenge for Chris because he had seen so much, and he had so much to write about. The story was over 10,000 words when it first came in, and it came in different drafts. There were so many different versions of the story that all happened within a week period."

– Shelley Youngblut

Too many words

Four days after the election, Koentges left for Bolivia.

"I had 22,000 words. I would send (Shelley) sections so she would know I was on track.

"I submitted a draft of 15,000 [words], then the 10,000, and even with the 10,000 I put brackets around stuff that could be cut."

– Chris Koentges

Filing the story

"He filed the last draft of the story from bus stations and Internet cafes in South America. I got the final, final, final draft of the story the Monday we went to press and I still had to cut 4,000 words. You just go in and you try really hard not to remove an important body organ."

– Shelley Youngblut

Editing 10,000 to 7,000 words

- The editor cut out a whole first section about the campaign's concerns that Nenshi was coming across as gay.

- Youngblut said it wasn't the point of the story, just as Nenshi being Muslim wasn't the point of the story or the campaign.

Cut section: Gay mannerisms

"... A gay issue has to do with inflection and mannerisms. With exuberance. His face becomes animated, for instance, whenever he makes an excessively valid point. 'Gays and nerds are closely related species,' a University of Calgary sociologist who goes by frege64 half-joked on the Calgary Flames discussion forum calgarypuck.com 48 hours after the polls closed."

- This section was cut from both print and online versions.

Front section edit – continued

"The candidate is an exuberant nerd, who started his academic career taking drama classes. And though the team worked on his mannerisms, there is not much that can be done about exuberance. From a distance, in the purple, he and his team looked a little like Barney and friends. 'Women seem to *like* that he's the biggest nerd in the world,' the campaign strategist said, shrugging his shoulders. He is who he is. And if you *still* need to know, 'the answer's no – and why does it matter?'"

Writer laments the lost front section

"I thought the top of the story that was cut off was vitally important. I know she's got lots of other parameters to keep in mind. It's upsetting to see even a comma move. At the end of the day, it's her magazine, she's a client of mine, and I'm giving her hopefully what she wants. I was devastated to see it was gone, but that's magazine writing."

– Chris Koentges

Last-minute decision

From the earliest drafts, Koentges didn't name any of the story characters. Youngblut struggled with this.

> "He wanted everyone in the story to be known by their role in the campaign . . . I understood what his impulse was, and I understood why in the great metaphoric sense of the campaign it would make sense, but I thought the reader would be hopelessly lost and that it would draw attention to itself as a device and take away from the real strength of the story. I put in all the proper names."
>
> – *Shelley Youngblut*

Story lead

"Just after 11 p.m. on the night before the election, two blocks south of City Hall in a minimally furnished basement headquarters, there is a 27" by 34" sheet of paper on the back of the candidate's door. At the top are four headings written with a Sharpie, representing Higgins, McIver, Nenshi and Voter Turnout by percentage."

Theme statement: Full sentences

The “full sentences” theme ran like a thread through the story:

“Politics in full sentences means that you, the citizen, must talk back.”

“In the old conversation, you'd hear, ‘Well, Barb's a really good face for the city and I like her moxie’ or ‘Ric's a Conservative and I only vote Conservative.’ But if you're engaging in politics in full sentences, what comes after that?”

Theme statement #2

"But the implication was that it wouldn't matter who the candidate was once Calgarians figured out that this level of dialogue was in their city's best interest."

"In seemingly ideological Alberta, there was an emerging swell of a populist movement – politics in full sentences – with its roots in Edmonton and a momentum now in Calgary."

Theme statement #3

“It’s not the candidate who is supposed to save the day. The lesson of this campaign is that you have to do something, man.”

“It's impossible to determine the value of this sudden media attention – the message of grassroots reform in full sentences triumphing over whatever Calgary is assumed to be – but it's worth millions of dollars more than we spend advertising the Stampede. Nenshi's message was: You think you know Calgary? You don't know about the potential of this place.”

Use of description

Describing Nenshi's supporters:

"Maybe their most important attribute is what they do after work. They go to community theatre and cheer for the Stamps at McMahon Stadium, line up for tarp rush at Folk Fest, and attend the city's various lecture series. They know where to find the best Vietnamese subs in town. Which is to say, they participate in the experience of Calgary, in all of its opportunities."

Supporters at home party for Nenshi

Use of description: Election night

Setting the scene:

"At 8 p.m. on election night, there was a copy of the Election Bylaws on the campaign director's desk. There was a dog leash. There was a five-dollar bill. There was a photo of someone's front yard with a homemade sign that said: 'Hey Sign Thief. I'm Still Voting For Nenshi.'"

Use of quotes

"'Half the ties on this rack are purple,' he muses."

– Chima Nkemdirim, campaign manager, in a clothing store, noting the connection between purple and the campaign colour

"I wonder if I should run – you're on the team, right?"

– Naheed Nenshi, talking to friends in Vancouver

"'That guy' – meaning Nenshi – 'could be the next mayor of Calgary,' someone said."

Use of quotes – continued

"My mom, of course, makes the best samosas in Calgary."

– *Naheed Nenshi, talking about his East Indian heritage*

"'We're getting a conversion rate of 20 per cent?,' the candidate asked in disbelief." [Naheed Nenshi]

"'People are calling my mom,' she said. 'They looked up the number in the phone book and called to say they had voted for her son.'"

– *Shaheen Nenshi, the candidate's sister*

Use of numbers

"It seems urgent, for example, that the candidate reach 10,000 Facebook friends on election day. Higgins had levelled out around 1,700 friends earlier in the week."

"Lorie Stewart, the [Nenshi] handler, has the candidate getting 36 percent of the vote, McIver 29 and Higgins 23, with 47-percent voter turnout."

"The hashtag #yycvote is trending on Twitter, peaking at two tweets per second."

"The $15-million Baitan Nur mosque, built entirely through donations from the community, is nearby."

Ending

"I ask Jeff [campaign worker] what will happen next. He doesn't answer by congratulating himself. He doesn't congratulate Calgarians for doing what everyone outside Calgary is calling amazing. He says he'll be at City Hall next week. He'll wear his purple T-shirt. He'll listen to and watch the candidate he helped make the mayor, just like the candidate had watched the previous mayor. 'He's still a politician,' Jeff says. 'I'm going to watch him very closely.' That is what this movement is about."

“Full Sentences” photography

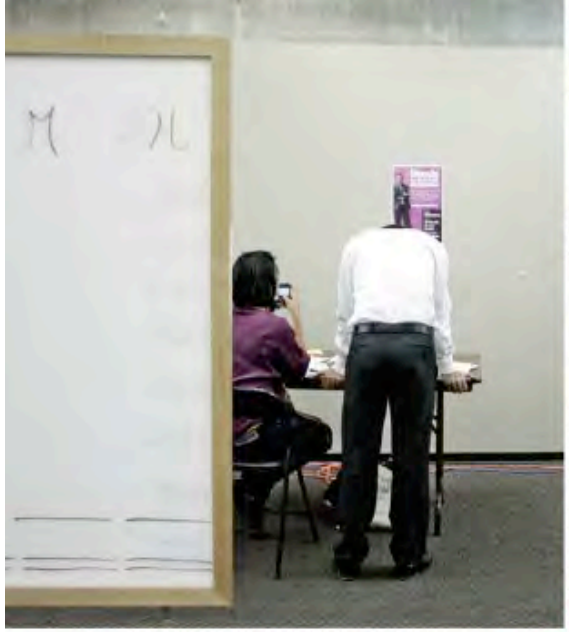
“The photos helped a lot. It didn’t read long, and the fact that it was set up in scenes really helped a lot.”

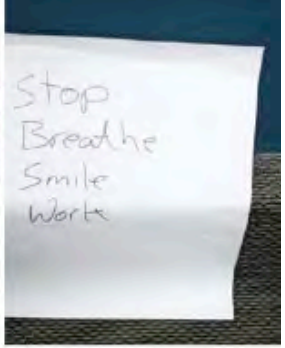
– *Shelley Youngblut*

The campaign office

"I go into these jobs with a 'shoot everything' mandate. Even though I may have only one or two frames of each thing, I'll shoot everything I can because you never know what is going to be used."

– *Randy Gibson, photographer*

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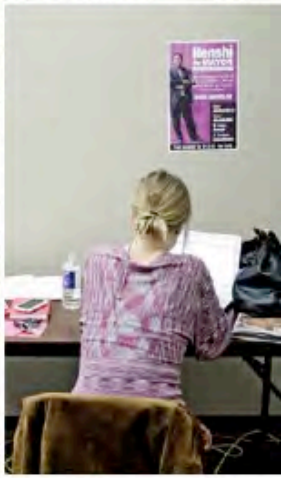

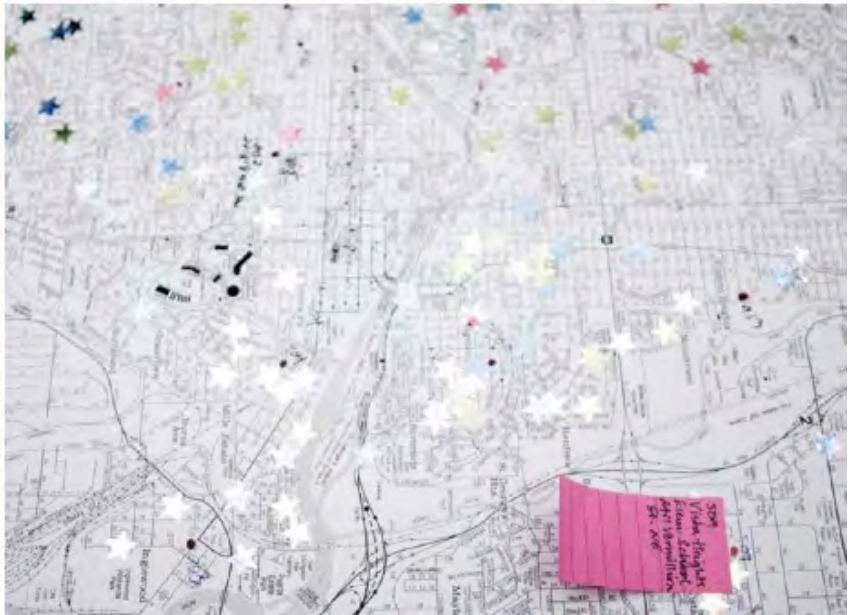

Technical aspects

- A Canon EOS 60D was used to shoot both stills and HD video.
- Gibson turned a series of stills, shot between six and seven frames per second, into video that was posted on swervecalgary.com.
- He used just two lenses: A Canon EF 24-70 mm f/2.8 and a Canon EF 15 mm f/1.8.
- Gibson did very little touch-ups on the photos because he wanted them to look real.

The Purple Perk Coffee Shop

"It was all shot with natural light, no flash at all. I wanted to not be there; I wanted to lurk.

"I never even considered opening my flash."

– *Randy Gibson*

The last home party

"There were a lot of people in one little house, spread out along the hallway, the room he was speaking in, clustered around him, and then the dining room behind, and people sitting on the stairs, people listening. There were people who couldn't see him at all but were just listening to what he had to say."

– *Randy Gibson*

"In the palm of his hand"

"From a photo standpoint it was tricky, but what I love about these is that you can see he has everyone's attention on lockdown. That's all I was trying to illustrate. He had them in the palm of his hand."

– Randy Gibson

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Success story

"I had so many people who wouldn't sit down to read this kind of a lengthy story so grateful that they had. I remember people who were really involved in the campaign saying 'this is it, this is what it felt like, this is what I experienced.'"

– Shelley Youngblut

Once-in-a-lifetime story

"After they had won, I got sick with nerves wondering 'Oh ****!' It's great, it's what we wanted. There's euphoria. But if he had lost it would've been a couple of thousand words, and now it was this huge thing. This is the once-in-a-lifetime Calgary story."

– Chris Koentges

Change happens

"This is how the establishment falls. It happens, as any real change does, slowly, then suddenly. And then, when it becomes hyper-sudden, it happens in freeze frames. At 11:49 p.m., [*Calgary Herald* columnist] Don Braid tweeted: 'In nearly 40 years of covering politics, truly the most astonishing thing I've ever seen! #yycvote #yyccc #yyc.' Over the next week, Nenshi began showing up on BBC and CNN, and did one-on-one interviews on every major Canadian news show."

Writer's final comments

"There were certain things I thought about this campaign going in that I was really wrong about. It would have been really easy to go out and prove them even as I was seeing different.

"If it's not what other people are saying it is, that's something to get really excited about. It means that you've got a real story. It took me a while to realize that. You're doing real reporting if you're telling the world what it doesn't already know."

– Chris Koentges

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> Today, Calgary is a different place than it was yesterday. It's a better place. And not because of me, but because of you.

INSIDE THE CAMPAIGN THAT BROADENED THE DEFINITION OF WHAT OUR CITY CAN BE.

Written by Chris Koentges + Photographed by Randy Gibson

Inside the final three days of the campaign that changed the definition of what our city can be. The team—more defined by its adeptness at winging it than by its purple T-shirts and ties—bet on a Calgary that doesn't exist... yet. It was a substantial bet. It was an audacious bet. And today, it remains a collective bet.

THE CAMPAIGN IN FULL SENTENCES.

Written by Chris Koentges + Photographed by Randy Gibson

Just after 11 p.m. on the night before the election, two blocks south of City Hall in a minimally furnished basement headquarters, there is a 27" by 34" sheet of paper on the back of the candidate's door. At the top are four headings written with a Sharpie, representing Higgins, McIver, Nenshi and Voter Turnout by percentage. Down the left side are the names of each member of the Nenshi campaign team, several of whom are now crammed inside the candidate's office, trying to figure out what they might have missed. What they are really doing, however, is eyeing the election pool and calculating how to tweak their bets. It is not clear when the act of creating the campaign ended and the act of consuming it began.

They are obsessed with the pool, not out of nervousness or bravado, but because they are profoundly curious about which campaign will win. Maybe that's a detachment that comes from living on Twitter and Facebook. Maybe it has something to do with being perpetual outsiders. It seems urgent, for example, that the candidate reach 10,000 Facebook friends on election day. Higgins had levelled out around 1,700 friends earlier in the week. "After *that Thursday* nobody wanted to wear her as a badge of honour," says the team's pollster, Brian Singh.

A white Jack Russell terrier named Jack sniffs around the office. Someone asks about the schedule on Monday night. Like—what happens after 8 p.m.? Who to phone, who to invite? Different speeches would have to be made. "If it's Ric," the candidate says to the chagrin of his campaign strategist, Stephen Carter, "I'd like to do it in person." The others in the room nod. "If it's Barb, I'll phone her."

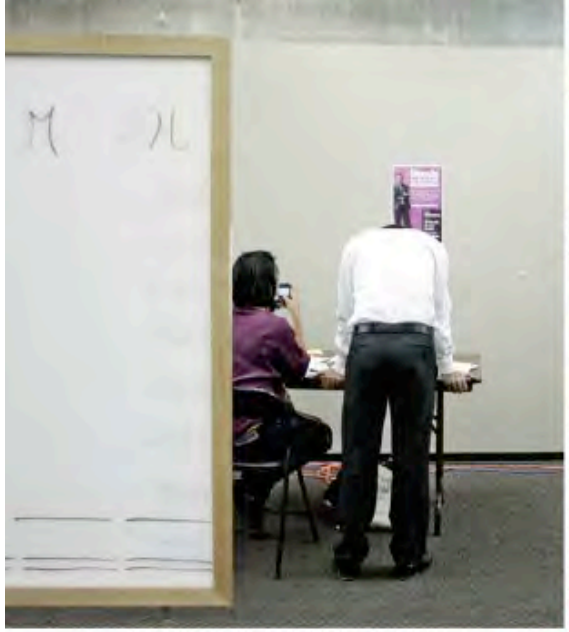
Lorie Stewart, the handler, has the candidate getting 36 percent of the vote, McIver 29 and Higgins 23, with 47-percent voter turnout. She moved to Calgary five years ago, having previously worked for eBay at the height of the Silicon Valley rush. But she never connected to Calgary, citing a frustrating kind of over-regulation mixed with a certain kind of greed. She would find small pockets of people who wanted to do better in a social way, but where were the big conversations that had taken place in the Bay Area?

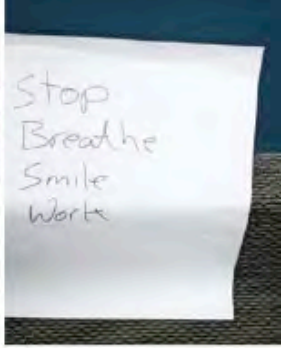
She was not ready to go home to Ontario, though. Vancouver was too wet. On a whim, she boxed up all her possessions and bought a ticket to Peru. Three days before leaving, a visit to the doctor turned into a very rare diagnosis of colorectal cancer. Not only was she going to die, she was going to die alone in a place she had come to despise.

This is where Calgary excels. She lived 10 minutes from the Tom Baker Cancer Centre, where one of the world's foremost experts ran a clinic. She had surgery in December, followed by chemotherapy and radiation. It would have cost her several hundred thousand dollars in the U.S. and she would have essentially been on her own. Here, people she barely knew came out of the woodwork to support her. Halfway through her treatment, she made a deal with herself to embrace Calgary with her entire being. And so, in April 2009, still weak, she found herself dragged to a Calgary incarnation of the TED lecture series. It was a very hard ticket to get. Hopeful attendees needed to submit a written proposal. The candidate gave one of the lectures. Thirteen minutes after it had begun she knew how she was going to make good on her deal.

She is one of two handlers (Kate Easton is the other one) working with the campaign and her job is exactly as it sounds: Survey the room to identify the potential pitfalls and the opportunities to lay on the charm. Pull the candidate out of conversations that are going nowhere. Insert him into the ones that can make a difference. Above all, make him look like the mayor of Calgary. (Nenshi would sometimes show up in an untucked shirt and crooked tie, still looking like "the professor.") Depending on the living room, the handler might play a mother-hen role or act as a surrogate sister. At seniors facilities, she'd be asked: "Are you his girlfriend?" "I'm a very close friend," she'd answer with a wink. Then the candidate, the handler and Calgarians would all drink tea and attempt to figure out whether it made sense that they had to pay for the water and sewer infrastructure that connects their city with private developers' highly profitable

THE CANDIDATE:
Naheed Nenshi

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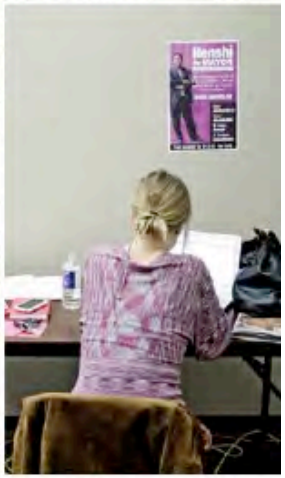

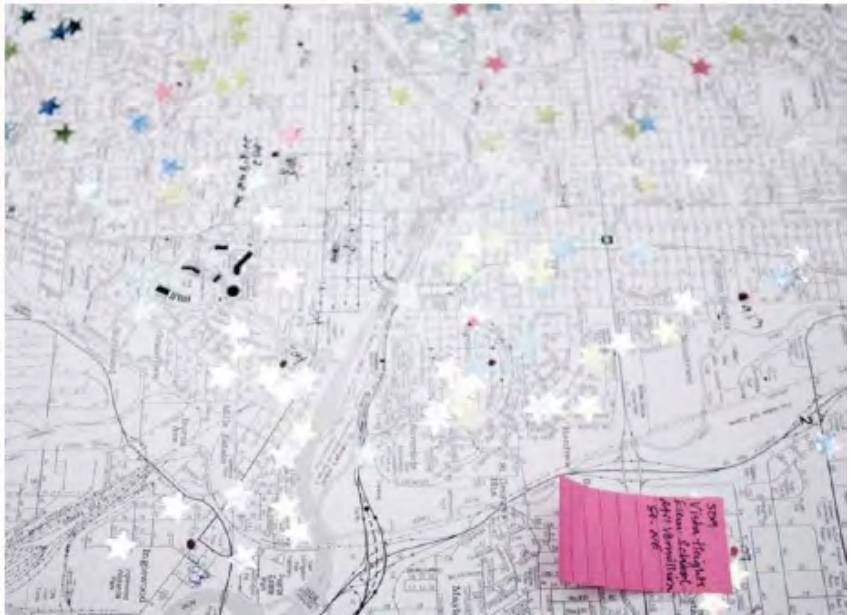

sprawl. (Nenshi was careful not to demonize developers, insisting that better models of higher-density, win-win projects existed.)

What had initially made Barb Higgins so attractive as a candidate was that she'd existed, night in, night out, for years in our living rooms. The Nenshi campaign couldn't compete with a local TV star, and so they literally sent their ballyhooed social-media candidate into Calgary's living rooms as the political version of Brownie Wise, the woman who sold Tupperware in the 1940s. The team created a program where people who don't normally get involved in an election could meet the candidate for a coffee party. If you still have no idea what Twitter is—and don't worry, most of the people who voted for Nenshi wouldn't know a retweet from a hashtag—these small, focused gatherings are its methodical flesh-and-blood precursor. Instead of a newspaper editorial board, Calgarians would be the ones vetting this very unique candidate. They would report back to their friends and become personally invested in his campaign in the process.

Sometimes Nenshi would hit a coffee party with a hundred supporters; other times he'd get less than half a dozen conspiracy theorists demanding to know about fluoride and mind control. But it was always a two-way conversation. Politics in full sentences means that you, the citizen, must talk back. In contrast, the unspoken message throughout the Higgins campaign was: *Barb is appearing at a certain location—come meet Barb.* It was traditional, passive one-way dialogue, a candidate talking *at* us. By Labour Day, Nenshi was spending as much time at these parties as at the more public appearances and forums. He stood in our living rooms and proposed to build a city where you can walk to the grocery store. If there is an amazing thing about this election—and a reason not to feel too smug about ourselves—it is that we had not voted for such an idea before.

A little after 1:15 p.m. on election day, things have begun to pick up at campaign headquarters on 11th Avenue. TV reporters are arriving. The hashtag #yycvote is trending on Twitter, peaking at two tweets per second. The campaign director, Chima Nkemdirim, slips away for a leisurely stroll up Macleod Trail, then down Stephen Avenue and into Winners. His iPhone periodically vibrates. No disasters yet. He stops in front of a rack of ties. "Half the ties on this rack are purple," he muses. This makes him giggle. His giggle is infectious, like something between hiccups, the squeak in an old wood floor, and a temperate rainforest at sunrise. It is easy to underestimate this gentle giggling man.

Nkemdirim is a partner in the law firm of Fraser Milner Casgrain. He had cut back on his billable hours before finally taking time off to direct the campaign once it hit full stride. Like everybody on the team—except Stephen Carter, the strategist—he is a volunteer. It is also fair to say he is one of the two savviest political minds in Calgary right now. A political campaign in the year 2010 moves at a reckless speed. The campaign director spends a lot of time telling the team around him: *wait a second*. He, not the candidate, has the last word on every single decision.

The day before, he had been inside a big purple warehouse on Macleod Trail and 24th, which had originally been Kent Hehr's headquarters. Wearing a conductor's cap and thick black glasses, Nkemdirim was giving the rah-rah speech to 75 volunteers who would act as scrutineers on election day. "Your job is to make sure the election is fair tomorrow," he told them. "An election is run by humans and humans make mistakes." Again, it's a subtle thing, but this is the tone of politics in full sentences. Humans make mistakes. The goal is to find the mistake, then correct the mistake. If the mistake is repeated, then the goal is to correct the system. The goal in these conversations is never to assign blame. Modern politics has replaced ideas and solutions with the assignment of blame. We are being eaten, as a culture, from the inside out by blame.

To watch Nkemdirim looking at ties on the last Saturday before the election, you would never have known that there was a crisis back at headquarters. Even when he had to tell the candidate, who is also his best friend, about the crisis, there was no trace of dread or worry. He giggled a little bit and asked, "So... what's the worst thing that could go wrong today?"

"Umm," the candidate answered, "the phone bank crashed?" Nenshi kept guessing. "The website's down?" He was now giggling, too. "A rogue volunteer shot somebody!" (Yesterday's crisis involved a guy in purple yelling obscenities at strangers in the Brentwood Mall parking lot.) The candidate kept thinking of funnier things that could go wrong on the day before the election, while Nkemdirim whispered, louder, then louder—"it's the first one."

"Oh," said Nenshi. "That's not good."

Volunteers had arrived at 10 a.m. to start making calls and it was now four hours later with no phones. Nkemdirim had a shiver of déjà vu. During his last campaign, Hehr's successful bid for the MLA seat in Calgary Buffalo, the phones had gone down on election day. He had vowed—*vowed*—that this would not happen. "I don't want it to crash," was the only thing he said when stipulating what he wanted in a phone system. He was assured that the network he selected hadn't gone down in 15 months.

> This is the tone of politics in full sentences: Human beings make mistakes. The goal is to find the mistake, then correct the mistake. If the mistake is repeated, then the goal is to correct the system. The goal in these conversations is never to assign blame.

Two days earlier, Nenshi volunteers had begun calling McIver supporters. It's a seemingly brash tactic—reminding your opponent's supporters "to come vote in the election the next day." During their regular afternoon debriefing, Nkdemdirim had shown the candidate one of the call sheets. He giggled as Nenshi started to count. "We're getting a conversion rate of 20 percent?" the candidate asked in disbelief.

The pair met during their first year at the University of Calgary. By their fourth year, Nenshi was the president of the Student's Union and Nkemdirim was vice-president. After graduation they backpacked together across Europe. Every four years since—in the Olympic/World Cup year—they've gone on a trip. Across Canada. South America. Australia/Southeast Asia. This year was supposed to be Africa. Instead they found themselves on a journey of purple ties and crashed phones, with impatient volunteers eager to use their iPhones and Blackberries to take up the slack.

"No!" the campaign director told them. "It'll be too expensive."

"We have free evenings and weekends!"

THE STRATEGIST:
Stephen Carter

THE HANDLER:
Kate Easton

He thought about it for a second, then shook his head wildly. "I don't think you should call people from your personal phones." (Like surely there are rules against that.) And so, with less than 36 hours to go in the election, Nkemdirim found himself in line at the Wireless Wave kiosk in Marlborough Mall trying to get a deal on a contingency bank of 10 cellphones. It was difficult not to wonder what was going on at McIver HQ. Nkemdirim had heard rumours about a hundred live lines. "Not robo-dialers," he said. "Live people." He was competing against a campaign run by two of the most successful strategists—not just in Calgary but in all of Canada—a campaign that had spent three years raising money, and now outspent its rivals 3 to 1. Nkemdirim giggled. He clearly had them exactly where he wanted them.

In most campaigns, phoners and door knockers are given a script. Nenshi's campaign asked them instead to read the candidate's "Better Ideas." After that, they could talk about whatever they wanted. The campaign's volunteers embody a weird mix of intelligence, naiveté and sincerity, which you seldom find in life, let alone in politics. If they heard that you were undecided or that you were thinking of voting for McIver or Higgins, their first question—and this was definitely not in the standard script—was, *why?* It was neither condescending nor confrontational, but rather rooted in curiosity. You must have had a very good reason, something the volunteer in the purple T-shirt had missed. There was a genuine belief that, through conversation, they'd have an opportunity to change your mind just as you could try to change theirs. Instead of one Calgarian trying to bully another into voting for a certain candidate—or a political party—you could help each other find some kind of higher truth. They would talk about how low property taxes are right now in inner-city Detroit, about talk traffic solutions from Curitiba, Brazil. The thinking was that the smartest, most articulate candidate with the best and most detailed ideas should win the election. In the old conversation, you'd hear, "Well, Barb's a really good face for the city and I like her moxy" or "Ric's a Conservative and I only vote Conservative." But if you're engaging in politics in full sentences, what comes *after* that?

You might have the impression that Nenshi's base was made up of students and the candidate's cousins. But there were corporate lawyers working from home as schedulers, firemen pounding signs into strategic corners, retired professors out knocking on doors several hours a day for three straight months. These are people who watch Colbert and Stewart, have a sharp wit, an eye for hypocrisy and—above all—have had it with the buffoonery that is party politics in Alberta (forget about Ottawa). They find authenticity and sincerity immensely appealing, and they can get behind a municipal candidate who embodies these traits.

Maybe their most important attribute is what they do *after* work. They go to community theatre and cheer for the Stamps at McMahon Stadium, line up for tarp rush at Folk Fest, and attend the city's various lecture series. They know where to find the best Vietnamese subs in town. Which is to say, they participate in the *experience* of Calgary, in all of its opportunities. The campaign director's goal from the beginning was to have detailed conversations with what he describes as "hyper-engaged voters," the people you go to the week before an election and ask, "Who should I vote for?" (The hyper-engaged have very little agenda beyond being annoyingly right.)

There is, of course, a catch in targeting the hyper-engaged. "You can't be flippant with them," Nkemdirim says. "They are critical."

And so, the team encouraged them to be critical. They'd release a policy with a question: *"Is this a good idea?"* The idea would be discussed. The campaign didn't delete negative comments, and after the discussion the resulting policy was no longer a single candidate's better idea, nor the better idea of a campaign team—a total of seven votes on Oct. 18. It was the much better idea that belonged to several dozen of the hyper-

engaged, who then went about selling it to the next ring of slightly less engaged Calgarians. The campaign originally was mocked for polling at 1 percent. But they had the 1 percent you want.

Releasing big meaty policy is nothing new. The year Bronconnier won after polling in third place on nomination day, he'd released a thick booklet. Nkemdirim likes to remind anyone who might think the Nenshi campaign's strategy came out of nowhere that Don Iveson became a twentysomething alderman three years ago in Edmonton by running on reams of detailed information. (Nkemdirim and Nenshi even borrowed one of the Iveson campaign's central themes, the one about "politics in full sentences.")

Most of the other candidates waited until after Labour Day to release their platforms in order to maximize traditional media attention. It was too late. Within hours, these platforms—many of them high on platitudes and short on specifics—were eviscerated by the hyper-engaged, who found themselves tweeting and retweeting on the Nenshi campaign's behalf. The hyper-engaged on calgarypuck.com, for instance, strongly championed Nenshi, as did their counterparts on the automobile discussion forum beyond.com. It was the first time in their life they knew a campaign was transparent because, well, they had become the campaign, and surely they had no secret agenda.

The last coffee party on the last Saturday afternoon had just ended in Rocky Ridge, and the candidate and the second handler, Kate Easton, were zig-zagging a long way west toward the mountains in order to go a much longer distance east.

The great misconception throughout this election was that because Nenshi is brown and Nkemdirim is black and half the people on the team are some shade in between, they had the N.E. in the bag. Anybody who said this has never campaigned in the quadrant. Over the years, the campaign team has had their individual asses handed to them by the knee. Nenshi and Nkemdirim finished fourth in their first civic campaign, the Ward 3 aldermanic race in 2004. Carter ran a competitor's campaign in the same riding and finished second. Despite the scars—and their commitment to sophisticated statistical analysis, social media, robo-dialing, and all the post-millennial campaign tools—they all believe that campaigning in N.E. Calgary is an art.

Nobody was better at it going in than McIver. McIver gets the N.E. in the traditional way. He's connected to the community leaders. He's come through for them. Most important—and this can't be overstated—McIver had been the perceived frontrunner since February. If you live east of Deerfoot Trail, it's not a stretch to say that your people have come from a place where voting for the winner was essential to their survival. "They know how to read the tea leaves," Carter says. They always vote for the winner.

Nenshi and Stewart cut through an empty industrial area, arriving at a jammed parking lot. "I assume it's very casual, but one must be ready for anything," he said giddily. They climbed the stairs now to a Hindu temple. It was the last night of the Durga Pooja, which was a whir of gold and red—and yes, some purple—saris. There were garlands of fresh flowers. Strong incense. Kids on their parents' shoulders rang a big bell as they entered. Vettivelu Nallainayagam was waiting inside. He teaches macroeconomics at Mount Royal University. He is an earnest man, who has written a book called "My Contribution To Civic Discourse In Calgary." He is most proud of the essay "Saying No To Politically Correct Christmas." Nallainayagam, who was going out on a limb for the candidate, was a little apprehensive. The candidate shook some hands. "I hope you're having a wonderful Pooja," he said. They are worshipping the Goddess of Learning. This is a recurring theme in N.E. Calgary: reverence for learning; education as the great equalizer. In such a context, the notion of the candidate, whom rivals have tried to dismiss as "the professor," seems less preposterous.

At the feast, Nenshi's senses seem heightened, his body language more alert. He pops a samosa, and commends it as the second-best he has tasted. ("My mom, of course, makes the best samosas in Calgary.")

"In 2004, we didn't know what we were doing," Nkemdirim says. "Door knocking in N.E. Calgary doesn't work." People don't really answer their doors, and when they do, you can't count on communicating complex ideas in English. To show these communities they were serious, the team published the Better Ideas brochure in a dozen different languages, using a free Google app to crowd source each translation. On a Sunday morning, one of the candidate's cousins dropped off some better ideas that had been translated into Farsi for a small group of Afghans who worship at the mosque. One phone call then set off a chain of phone calls through the community of 2,000. "You have to go through various mosques, churches, and temples because that's where the community leaders are," Nkemdirim says. In the last campaign, they put signs in the wrong place. Worst of all, it was a race for alderman, and Nenshi was putting forth policies that you'd expect to hear from the mayor. Nobody cared. They wanted the potholes fixed.

Driving deeper into the N.E on Saturday night, Nenshi and Easton passed a few blocks from the candidate's home en route to the Falconridge Community Centre for a fundraising event with Jay Bal, who was running for alderman. McIver had already put in an appearance. There were lots of blue buttons, and hardly any purple. "Where are the Punjabi brochures?" the candidate asked. "Sat-sri-akal," he said as he rushed inside. Bal's aunt, Nina Bhullar, hovered near the door. "Sat-sri-akal." ("Welcome.") Bhullar, who has been a psychiatric nurse for 20 years, watched the candidate cautiously move through the room. "He has so much knowledge," she said. Why, then, was she supporting McIver? "I've known him for a very long time. He's very approachable. He's reliable. He listens." She has three children—all over 18. "They're voting for him," she said, pointing to Nenshi and smiling. "They're very Calgarian."

The 31st candidate forum of the campaign took place in Marlborough Park on Oct. 13. Everyone brought droves of supporters—the candidate likened it to a wrestling match. There was a large group of Sikh taxi drivers wearing Higgins T-shirts. They yelled for Nenshi to come pose for a photo when he entered. He leapt into the middle of the frame, making a kind of ta-dah gesture, and they pretended to beat him up. The president of Associated Cabs watched. There were layers of subtext that are difficult to unravel. ("You have to understand East Calgary in order to understand what was happening at that forum," Nenshi said later, the only time in the 72 consecutive hours I spent shadowing him during the final days of the campaign that he was reluctant to speak on the record.)

During the forum, Nenshi likened Barb Higgins to a tourist. While it made a convenient political point—"that was very calculated," he later admitted—it was also hard in that moment to differentiate the candidate from the kid who grew up in Marlborough Park, whose feelings might have genuinely been hurt that a popular anchorwoman—and a serious candidate for mayor—would introduce her vision for East Calgary by talking about social workers and crime.

If you want to understand N.E. Calgary, Nenshi's got a tour. The abridged version begins east off 28th Street and Memorial at a strip mall called Short Pants Plaza. You must take transit to get there. You buy a patty at Lloyd's Patty Plus, *sfeeha* from Village Pita, purple yam ice-cream from Lolit's Takeout. Try Safari Grill for East African if you want to sit down. Spend a couple hours at Forest Lawn Library after that. Read up on something you've always wondered about. You'll eventually head to Westwinds/McKnight, which is the northern terminus of the North East Line. The station is shaped like an upside-down canoe. There is a time capsule that tells the story of the people in the community. The $15-million Baitan Nur mosque, built entirely through donations from the community, is nearby. Calgary's third-best samosas can be found at The Samosa Factory. If it's summer, find a soccer field. Sit on the grass. Watch what will seem like the whole world kicking a ball around at that moment. Then head to Sunridge Mall. It's a

mall like every other mall in town. There is an Old Navy like all the other Old Navies. Of course, if you're really serious, you'll end the day at Village Park Leisure Centre, where people swim in all manner of bathing attire. In the change room, you realize your similarities.

On Feb. 24, 2010, Nenshi was standing in line at Japa Dog on Burrard Street in Vancouver. Team Canada was about to play Russia. His iPhone vibrated. His jaw dropped. Bronconnier wasn't going to run for re-election. He hung up, turned to Brian Singh, and half asked, half stated: "I wonder if I should run—you're on the team, right?" When the puck dropped, he was at the Anza Club, which is a bit like a rumpus room, about half a dozen blocks from the Athletes' Village, sitting at a table full of expat Calgarians. The score was 6-1 four minutes into the second period. Nenshi's iPhone kept vibrating.

Months before Bronconnier's announcement, Nenshi had begun building a slate of intelligent people to run for different spots on council. He'd quietly been asking around, specifically looking for the right person to put forward for mayor. Nobody wanted to do it. *They fight too much. It's unglamorous. There's a huge pay cut.*

After the hockey game ended in a 7-3 Canada victory, Nenshi asked the folks around the table who *they* wanted as mayor. If there was a unifying thing about these Calgary expats, it was how vigorously they had committed themselves to their home town in their early 20s, whether as writers, architects, lawyers, musicians, doctors or community activists. But Calgary had disappointed them. They headed to New York and Toronto and Vancouver looking for *that thing* they were missing. For lack of a better word, let's call it "a potential that was actively being fulfilled." When they found it elsewhere, it made them resent the time they'd invested trying to build it in Calgary.

"*That guy*"—meaning Nenshi—"could be the next mayor of Calgary," someone said. There was a round of dismissive laughter—the expats were smug in their belief that Calgarians would never vote for an articulate, righteous, brown guy.

Nenshi didn't know it then but, back in Calgary, Bev Longstaff, who had run for mayor against Bronconnier in the last election, had been trying to draft a similar roster of smart candidates. She'd asked a very senior manager at City Hall to throw in his hat for mayor. He declined, but said he had a candidate in mind.

"Who?" asked Nenshi, when she told him the story over lunch.

"That would be you," replied Longstaff, who spent the rest of the meal trying to convince Nenshi to run for alderman.

Meanwhile, Richard Einarson had been doing a similar draft in his imagination—it's a conversation we all have in our heads: who would be the dream mayor—but Einarson (let's call him "the scout") didn't tell his preferred candidate. Instead he created a Facebook page titled "Draft Nenshi," and 900 people friended the site. On May 25, Nenshi said, "Let's do it."

Now the communications manager of an official team, Einarson imagined a street corner at the height of the election, with several established aldermen clamouring for the top job. "We needed something to stand out on that corner." He built a website, which was originally blue and gold. "I hated those colours," he said, and so, for no other reason than the knowledge that no other campaign would pick it, the scout looked into the colour purple's political implications. In U.S. elections, swing states are often marked by purple, which struck Einarson as appropriate. Then it dawned on him. You make purple by mixing blue and red, the colours that traditionally represent the left and the right. This would become symbolic of the apolitical volunteers who would come to work on the campaign, many of whom were a little right on the spectrum on certain issues, and a little left on others.

Nenshi likes to argue that he ran an ideas campaign. Carter calls it "the first brand election in Alberta." In truth, it is hard to tell where one begins and the other ends. Think about the conversation you had over Thanksgiving dinner. (And remember, a Calgary civic-election campaign is a calculated race to become *the* Thanksgiving conversation.) If you discussed the purple candidate surging from behind, it was a brand election. If you discussed the specifics of his better ideas—not the fact that he had them, but the substance of what they were—it was an ideas election.

The poll that came out after Thanksgiving had Nenshi in a dead heat, for the first time, with his two rivals. This meant that Calgarians would not have to vote strategically; they could vote for the candidate with whom they most strongly identified. The moment the poll came out, one of the Calgary expats e-mailed me from Vancouver: *"I can't believe it. It is amazing It makes my eyes explode out of my head and almost puts me on the verge of tears. I am Calgarian. This is amazing. I am a loser for not helping more."*

> On the afternoon of election day, Nenshi's sister Shaheen tried to hold back tears. She had just put down her phone. 'People are calling my mom,' she said. 'They looked up the number in the phone book and called to say they had voted for her son.'

If you had sifted through the candidate's donor list that morning, you would have found the expat's name. It had been there since August. He had not given up on Calgary.

Nenshi's donor list is remarkable for the large numbers of individuals on it compared to the other campaigns, in which fewer donors made bigger donations—but also for the fact that the public could even view such a list during the election. The earlier Better Calgary campaign had put immense pressure on civic politicians to publish their donor lists. The Nenshi campaign took it one step further by attempting to update the list daily. Those who donated money—and this must surely be unprecedented in modern Canadian politics—would actually phone to complain that the Nenshi campaign hadn't published their names on the website fast enough, such was the intensity with which they identified with the brand of politics in full sentences.

On the afternoon of election day, Nenshi's sister Shaheen Nenshi Nathoo sat in Nkemdirim's office, trying to hold back tears. She had just put down her phone.

"People are calling my mom," she said. "They looked up the number in the phone book and called to say they had voted for her son."

At 2:16 p.m., the basement headquarters erupted in applause. The candidate had just made his 10,000th Facebook friend. The million-dollar question—not just for those who ran the campaign but for those who have begun to study it—is, how do you duplicate it? "There is so

much energy and equity we have with these people, it would be a shame to waste it," Singh says.

The catch is, well, there was only one person the scout wanted to draft when he came up with the Facebook page. It was one thing to invite the candidate into temples and living rooms and Facebook dens, "but he converted people when they heard him speak," Singh says. "This movement—it sort of has become a movement—if we can keep engaging Calgarians with real information…" He didn't finish his sentence. But the implication was that it wouldn't matter *who* the candidate was once Calgarians figured out that this level of dialogue was in their city's best interest.

Carter walks into Einarson's office. "That's possibly the greatest brand presentation I've seen in politics," he says.

"You, too," the scout replies.

"Yeah," says the strategist, "but I do it for a living."

Three days after the election, Stephen Carter was looking for his next job. Sharp and quick, he was the only paid member of the campaign team, even though they weren't originally sold on their strategist. He'd recently suffered financial setbacks after promoting the Dalai Lama and the World Water Ski Championships. He'd also headed up Alnoor Kassam's $1.5 million run for mayor in the last election, the antithesis of the Nenshi campaign in every way. Fortunately, for whatever combination of reasons—and one reason is that he genuinely likes the candidate—Carter came cheap. In the Kassam campaign, he had spent nearly $1.5 million for 35,442 votes (more than $42 a vote). In doing so, he learned everything—*everything*—there was to learn about getting his next candidate elected. He tested the effectiveness of billboards, brochures, and ads in every medium. While the exact tally's still being calculated, the Nenshi campaign spent approximately $300,000 for 140,263 votes (a bargain-basement $2.10 per vote).

Carter's Conservative ties, which ran the gamut from helping Joe Clark to working as Wild Rose leader Danielle Smith's chief of staff, also made the Nenshi people suspicious. Carter says he still doesn't know how to define Nenshi on the political spectrum. (One of the campaign's goals was to make Liberal and Conservative labels as irrelevant as gender, race and religion in this election.) "He's not a Liberal," he says. He stops to think. He shakes his head. He smiles. "I don't know what he is."

In the full-sentence conversations that defined the campaign, such complexity is seen as a positive. Carter compares the Wild Rose party's leader to Nenshi, using the term "whip smart" to describe both of them. "If they got into a debate, it would be a debate to the death." But there's a lot, he says, that they would agree upon. "Their fiscal conservatism has to do with a hatred of waste." Carter says this in a way that implies the hatred comes from somewhere deep in their souls. (Combine this hatred of waste with Nallainayagam's notion of "no to politically correct Christmas," and you have as clear a definition of the populist conservative identity in Calgary as you're going to find.)

Throughout the election, Nenshi kept repeating: "You can't really call yourself a fiscal conservative unless you grew up in a working-class family in Marlborough." When the candidate talks about sustainability he's not talking about destroying jobs in oil and gas. He's talking about spending a buck right now to save a hundred 10 years from now. Though he was seen to have ties to the provincial Liberal party, it was impossible to pin him down on any discernible ideological politics beyond frugality.

The problem, however, with identifying yourself as a Conservative in municipal politics is that you lose credibility with your base by questioning anything to do with men in uniforms. Calgary, it must be emphasized, is blessed with a police chief who speaks to the public in full sentences. But if you had to pick a single turning point in the election, it was the moment Nenshi questioned the police budget. It was done with thought and grace. Rick Hansen refuted the assertion, but he never publicly corrected the candidate. Higgins and McIver leapt to defend their chief. The candidate didn't waver.

At the coffee parties you'd see very intelligent men in their 50s and 60s seeming to peer deeply inside the candidate's soul. These are conservative men. More than the students raised on Jon Stewart, these men, who on some level still haven't given up on the promise of Preston Manning's Reform movement, have waited a long time to hear full sentences. The fact that a candidate could respectfully question a chief of police was mind-blowing. But it was also confusing. It was invariably these men who would ask, "Isn't it too late to do the airport tunnel?" Nenshi would answer that the airport authority doesn't get to hold a gun to Calgarians' heads. The airport authority works for us. The Stampede Board works for us. Calgary Transit works for us. The institutions that nobody in Calgary questions need to work for Calgarians.

Over the course of the final weekend, Nenshi began to hint that five percent of his brain was already drifting to the day after the election. He wanted to start with transit. There would be a lot of easy wins, including a good photo op of him smashing down the park-and-ride payment booths, then reprogramming the ticket machines on the platforms. "People ask me why the machines don't give change," he'd say, pointing out that you have to specifically make a machine that doesn't make change. "They'd rather have the extra quarter than a happy customer."

While McIver had support from federal Conservatives, he also seemed to be beholden to forces that did not necessarily have the best interests of Calgary in mind. He couldn't question the chief. He couldn't campaign at a Pride Parade. He was seen to be fighting for the freedom of private developers to build new communities any way they wanted. The tragedy of Ric McIver is that, deep down, he doesn't seem to be *that guy*.

The conservative men at the coffee parties—who are most certainly not *that guy* either but usually end up voting for the McIver-du-jour—have become ashamed of the juvenile screaming matches that pass for discourse in the House of Commons and the Alberta Legislature. And they were the ones who went out the furthest on a limb for Nenshi's campaign, if only so that they could shout, *Enough!*

There is a growing temptation to draw an analogy between the partnership of Naheed Nenshi and Chi Nkemdirim and that of Ralph Klein and Rod Love.

"No way," Carter says. "Nenshi's his own man."

Asked the same question, Nenshi quickly replies, "I'll tell you why you're wrong. We alternate being the front man. I do the civic. He does the provincial."

Three days after the election, Carter emphasized that the campaign director "has a lot of power right now." He outlined a couple of scenarios in which Nkemdirim could become premier and the purple revolution would continue.

An oddly overlooked fact in the aftermath of the campaign is that at

Jenshi
for MAYOR

the same time Nenshi was gaining traction with the hyper-engaged, Nkemdirim launched a new provincial party called the Alberta Party, which is also using the coffee-party model to engage voters. They called it the Big Listen. In seemingly ideological Alberta, there was an emerging swell of a populist movement—politics in full sentences—with its roots in Edmonton and a momentum now in Calgary.

Carter may have been the least overtly idealistic person on the team, but you could see how much he loved putting the word "premier" in front of Nkemdirim's name. It would confound the rest of Canada. It would be a staggering brand to create. Then when Nkemdirim agreed to become the new mayor's chief of staff, you could tell the strategist was a little bit disappointed. He wanted the Big Listen to become the Big Speak. Nenshi, likewise, was worried about his friend's new role if for no other reason than it was going to be a huge pay cut from his legal practice. That said, there was a lot they both had to learn at City Hall over the next three years. The movement would go nowhere if they didn't prove that their ideas could do more than win an election; now they would have to change Calgary for the better.

On the endless Saturday before the election, the candidate was three hours late for the arts forum at Broken City. M.I.A.'s "Paper Planes" blared from inside. There was a line out the door. Nenshi wondered how he would get in. Further up the line, a guy looked back. Then he looked back again. His eyes got wide. "Oh my God," he shouted. "It's f---ing Nenshi!"

Singh, the pollster, had been talking about the shift in cool. Even a few years ago, something like TEDxCalgary never would have happened here. He talked about the rock-star status of the people who were giving the lectures. "Every one of those guys got beat up in high school for being smart." At some point the candidate had gone from nerdy to charismatic. A curl would sometimes fall over his forehead like Superman's.

Nenshi was pushed inside the bar in a bit of a daze. He didn't have to remind the crowd that Monday was election day. Some had already voted, while others stressed over how high the stakes were, how many people they had spoken to about the better ideas, how happy they were to meet him. Although he makes a point of never seeming surprised, Nenshi's eyes grew wider and wider. "The apathetic youth vote," he whispered. (In his address to the U of C class of 1994, which graduated into a deep recession, Nenshi said: "We are to believe that we are part of the so-called Generation X, a group of slackers who will never amount to anything. I don't buy that… it's up to us to fight for our beliefs, for our values, and for the challenges that must happen.")

The candidate and his campaign director left Broken City to head back to headquarters to debrief. Further down 11th Avenue, two men were getting into a cab. They shouted: "Yo, Nenshi!" They left the cab door open and crowded around the candidate for a photo, taking two purple buttons. By the time everyone turned around, another group had jumped into the cab, which was pulling away hesitantly, the driver looking at the candidate, the two guys running after the cab. "Nenshi!" the first guy shouted. "Can't you do something, man?"

In the post-coital glow of an internationally celebrated campaign, this could be a problem. It's not the candidate who is supposed to save the day. The lesson of this campaign is that *you* have to do something, man.

"It's important to us—to everyone who is a part of this," Singh says. "This is what Obama neglected to do." The American president had mobilized an army of people to effect change, and then used his e-mail list over the next two years to spam them for donations.

To understand why this might not happen in Calgary, you had to be at the purple warehouse on the Sunday night before the election. Something called "Operation Purple Dawn" was supposed to take place. No one from the campaign team knew exactly what it was. They assumed it would be a good thing. They *hoped* it would be a good thing. They went

down with the candidate to see what was happening. There was an enormous cheer when Nenshi entered—it was his first visit to the warehouse. He gave a gracious speech. Then a volunteer got up to explain what was about to happen. "I went to Toys R Us, and I bought up their entire supply of purple chalk." The crowd was going to head out at midnight and write the roster of better ideas on the sidewalks of Calgary.

Nenshi's eyes kept wandering to an older man in a purple turban, with a beard down to his chest. This man stuck out among the other volunteers, who were dividing into small teams and heading out into the night. The man, who is powerful among a certain group of taxi drivers, had left N.E. Calgary and come to the edge of downtown to see what was happening with his own eyes. The man had a brief conversation with the candidate. He nodded at him approvingly. While the team was still uncertain, this man knew who the winner would be the next day.

At 8 p.m. on election night, there was a copy of the Election Bylaws on the campaign director's desk. There was a dog leash. There was a five-dollar bill. There was a photo of someone's front yard with a homemade sign that said: "Hey Sign Thief. I'm Still Voting For Nenshi."

Nkemdirim's notebook was open. He was making a list of people to call. At the top, he had started to write "M-a-y—," and then crossed it out, and put "Dave Bronconnier" underneath. Then the names of the winning aldermen. Then Premier Stelmach. Danielle Smith. David Swann. Brian Mason. It says something about being a lifelong outsider that he listed the opposition.

This is how the establishment falls. It happens, as any real change does, slowly, then suddenly. And then, when it becomes hyper-sudden, it happens in freeze frames. At 11:49 p.m., Don Braid tweeted: "In nearly 40 years of covering politics, truly the most astonishing thing I've ever seen! #yycvote #yyccc #yyc." Over the next week, Nenshi began showing up on BBC and CNN, and did one-on-one interviews on every major Canadian news show. It's impossible to determine the value of this sudden media attention—the message of grassroots reform in full sentences triumphing over whatever Calgary is assumed to be—but it's worth millions of dollars more than we spend advertising the Stampede. Nenshi's message was: *You think you know Calgary? You don't know about the potential of this place.*

That said, Calgarians seem to be waiting for the other shoe to fall. Normally you put a candidate in the mayor's office so he can help you out with land deals or do you some kind of favour. At the victory party, though, there was a growing determination that Nenshi better not change. He would still have to show up early and do the tarp run at Folk Fest. His niece and nephew still expected a babysitter.

A volunteer named Jeff arrived late to the party. Jeff had knocked on doors. He had handed flyers out in front of big-box grocery stores. He had talked about the better ideas on the SkyscraperPage forum. He had stayed up past midnight on Sunday, writing those ideas in purple chalk on Calgary streets. He had worked as a scrutineer all day. Then his phone died, and he didn't hear who won until he walked into HQ. All those things that frustrate us about the old conversation had been seemingly destroyed, and what came next would be a scenario in which Calgary either laid out a model of citizen engagement that the rest of Canada could follow or dissipated all that potential like the spirit-breaking fourth season of *The Wire*.

I ask Jeff what will happen next. He doesn't answer by congratulating himself. He doesn't congratulate Calgarians for doing what everyone outside Calgary is calling amazing. He says he'll be at City Hall next week. He'll wear his purple T-shirt. He'll listen to and watch the candidate he helped make the mayor, just like the candidate had watched the previous mayor.

"He's still a politician," Jeff says. "I'm going to watch him *very closely*."

That is what this movement is about.

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