

## &gt; WILD IN THE CITY

## A fluttering visitor spreading spring's joy

Tiger swallowtail's annual return a natural marker of the changing seasons

**M.L. BREAM**  
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

A flash of yellow darted overhead.

"Hi, Libby!" I said.

I was sitting on my backyard deck on a perfect late spring morning a week ago, enjoying my first cup of coffee. Above me, wispy cumulus clouds drifted across the clear blue sky. The air smelled freshly washed, carrying the fragrance of a thousand wildflower blooms.

There was no one else around. Just me, some cedar hedges, a forest of trees, some loud and persistent birds and high, high above me one large, yellow butterfly with bold black stripes.

It was the butterfly I was speaking to as it flitted through the treetops. The insect seemed to materialize, as if by magic, in a gap of the canopy. Then, fluttering through the foliage, it disappeared as quickly and mysteriously as it had arrived. When it passed over my house, I said hello.

I should say right now, lest anyone think I'm two neurons short of a synapse, that I know my gorgeous flying visitor is not, in fact, my late sister, Libby. It's just that I miss her so, and I love to think of her as this creature of ineffable beauty, a creature that brings me joy with every flap of its wings.

My big sister died suddenly in April 2015. Far too many maladies struck her in the years leading up to her death. Life was difficult for her; she was in persistent pain and had to use a walker to get around. But none of Libby's ailments was expected to cause her imminent demise. So it was a shock we were unprepared for when she died of something no one could have predicted — a catastrophic brain bleed that felled her where she stood, at home in her own apartment.

About a month after Libby's death, I noticed what I thought was an eastern tiger swallowtail butterfly in my backyard for the first time. For reasons un-



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A bright and bold tiger swallowtail butterfly in the Madawaska Valley lands on a lilac bush to feed on its nectar.

known to me, I immediately began to think of the yellow tiger as Libby's spirit, freed from her unco-operative flesh. It gave me pleasure to think of her as this blithe creature able to move through the air with the grace and poise of a prima ballerina.

As the years have passed since Libby's death, a tiger swallowtail has returned to my yard each spring, a natural marker of the change of seasons that I look forward to.

I'm not the only Torontonian who esteems these butterflies: eastern tiger swallowtails have the honour of being designated Toronto's (un)official butterfly in "Butterflies of Toronto," a publication of the city's Biodiversity Series. They also happen to be the official butterfly of a handful of U.S. states.

Perhaps the book's team of authors gave eastern tigers this particular tribute because they remain in our city all year. Unlike many of our familiar butterflies (like monarchs and red

admirals) that migrate to escape Toronto's harsh winters, eastern tigers are resident butterflies. Members of this species (*Papilio glaucus*) are able to forgo migration and survive freezing temperatures by overwintering as drab brown chrysalises, cryptic colouration that allows them to shelter largely unseen in leaf litter, tree stumps, loose tree bark and similar hidey-holes.

As the weather warms up in May, the insect leaves this resting stage, called diapause, and exits its chrysalis as an adult butterfly, now ready to go about its singular, existential business — mating and bringing the next generation of swallowtails to life. It's at this point in the year I begin to notice one single yellow butterfly fluttering about the trees in my yard, likely a male looking for a female with which to mate.

While I love to watch this high-flying display, it's a source of frustration for the photogra-

pher in me. The lone swallowtail I see over my yard is always on the move. It never lands — at least not where I can see it — making it impossible to get photos suitable for identification.

My sister Libby was flighty like this, too. As soon as she turned up somewhere, she'd be looking at her watch in anticipation of leaving. "Gotta boogie," she'd say, and with that, she'd be gone. She was every bit as mysterious as my now-you-see-em-now-you-don't butterfly. We never got quite enough of her.

Without a photo of the butterfly that visits my yard, I wondered what image I could use to go along with my story. Then I remembered that some years ago, while on vacation in the Madawaska Valley, I had taken many pictures of a yellow swallowtail that had landed on a lilac bush near me to feed on its nectar. Perhaps this butterfly was an eastern tiger?

I sent a photo of my unknown specimen to Antonia Guidotti, an entomology technician at the Royal Ontario Museum and a co-author of "The ROM Field Guide to Butterflies of Ontario," who said the Madawaska butterfly was more likely to be a Canadian tiger than an eastern tiger swallowtail because of the northerly location where I found it. The two tiger swallowtails are close relatives notoriously difficult to tell apart. In fact, until the early 1990s, the ROM field guide says they were considered subspecies of the same species.

I may never know for sure which of the tiger swallowtails has been flying over my yard. But that won't stop me from greeting it tomorrow morning when it flutters by. I hope Libby hears me when I say hi.

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## A café makes the most of its small-town appeal

Port Perry restaurant pivots in multiple ways to get through pandemic

**KARON LIU**  
FOOD REPORTER

In the last year, Christy Stone-Curry's Piano Inn and Café in downtown Port Perry became a lot of things. Like many restaurants, it pivoted to takeout, groceries and an online food shop. It's also opening a soft serve ice cream shop next month.

But something else is helping the business stay afloat.

Film productions have resumed shooting in Hollywood North and Port Perry, 85 kilometres east of Toronto and home to 10,000 residents, is often used as a doppelganger for a small American town in movies and TV shows.

In previous years, Piano Inn was used in Hallmark movies such as "Season of Love," Netflix horror series "Hemlock Grove" and HBO comedy series "People of Earth." In recent months, the "Jack Reacher" television show (based on the crime thriller novels that also became a film franchise) came to town for some action scenes and used the restaurant as a break room for cast members, plus an upcoming fight scene.

"They had a COVID team come into my restaurant, sanitize everything, which we already did anyway. They took all my tables and put one chair at each table. (The catering service) pulled up. There was one person that would hand out the food in a box and there was a team making sure everyone was six feet away. Everyone had



CHRISTY STONE-CURRY

times (set for) when they could come inside," Stone-Curry said, adding that the hotel suites above the restaurant often doubled as change rooms. "It was very impressive."

While the filming gives her another source of income, Stone-Curry says the bigger impact is having audiences being able to see Port Perry on the screen and in turn, drive up tourism when people travel again.

"My restaurant was just sitting empty for months on end, so I'm happy that production companies reached out," said Stone-Curry, noting that after her interview with the Star, she would be meeting with another location scout. "You just have to be grateful for all the little tidbits that come your way, as corny as it sounds."

The century-old corner build-

ing is part of Port Perry's downtown district that's lined with 19th-century heritage buildings that evoke the small town, Main Street vibe that would normally draw thousands of visitors each summer in addition to film shoots year-round.

Stone-Curry's grandfather bought the century-old building the restaurant and inn is housed in back in 1972. It housed various offices and retailers before Stone-Curry opened her business in 2002 alongside her husband, Rob Curry.

Being dependent on tourists and in an area where delivery apps aren't really a thing made surviving the pandemic extra challenging for the lunch spot.

"Lunch is a lower price point than dinner because we do quiches, crepes, mac and

cheese," Stone-Curry said. "At the beginning, we'd get maybe 10, 15 lunch orders because no one is driving to Port Perry and people are working at home."

Like many restaurants, she started selling bags of flour and yeast in the early days of the pandemic when baking ingredients and produce boxes were hard to come by in supermarkets. As the months went on, an online shop was created to sell an ever-changing menu of pies, cookies, doughnuts, soups, quiches, lobster macaroni and cheese and holiday-themed food boxes.

"I'm the queen of pivoting" laughs Stone-Curry. "We've done the best we could in thinking outside the box because if we just opened for takeout, it wouldn't work."

While the last year has left her

Christy Stone-Curry, right, is co-owner of the Piano Inn and Café in Port Perry, which has been used in film and television shoots in recent months as production picks up again in the industry.

no choice but to get creative with new ventures, Stone-Curry points out the costs of each pivot and shutdown.

"A soft serve machine isn't cheap," she said. "And when you have mayonnaise, that's not going to sit throughout a lockdown. There are things you can't use in a month or two. When we were allowed to have (in-person) dining, I had thousands of dollars of food coming in and two weeks later we're shut down again, and (have) a thousand dollars in beer that sat in my fridge. Restaurants have perishable things, not just lettuce, but also condiments, things that you can't just freeze."

A second patio for Piano Inn is also being built, in anticipation of the Ontario government allowing the return of outdoor dining later this month as the number of reported COVID-19 cases continues to decline.

On Saturday, the restaurant will have a booth at the Port Perry Farmers' Market selling its key lime and rhubarb pies, sticky toffee puddings, salad dressings and heat-and-serve meals. The following week, Matt's Soft Serve, an ice cream shop named after Stone-Curry's son with flavours inspired by the restaurant's pies, will open in a space next door that was originally supposed to be a waiting room for diners.

"I thought about what would happen if another shutdown comes, because it already happened three times," Stone-Curry said. "I need a space that's not dependent on indoor dining and people can just come in and leave."