

downtown border people

**a photographic-sociological experiment
by natalie gaudet, amelia herceg,
and finn macleod**

**Created in April 2014 for Border Culture at
University of Windsor, prof. Dr. Lee Rodney
School of Creative Arts - Visual Art**

Preface

The Windsor-Detroit border has a long, storied history. Human migration has formed distinct patterns that continue to impact the development of the region. *Downtown Border People* is the product of insatiable curiosity about true nature of human connection. We strive to expose the current state of emotional and physical relations between the populations of the two urban centres. By initiating a border-centric conversation in both downtown centres, w

Origins

The central ideology behind this project is our own diverse interactions with the United States as Canadians each raised in a different region of the country.

Natalie is from Moncton, New Brunswick. Amelia is from Amherstburg, Ontario. Finn is from Winnipeg, Manitoba.

We are fascinated by the spectrum of influence of American culture on Canadian, and vice versa. Each of us has been influenced to a different degree by living near a border. Our intent is to investigate the broader effects of living in the Windsor-Detroit border culture.

Curatorial Statement

Natalie

This project grew out of an interest in exploring the contemporary human experience of the border. Coming from another part of Canada and never having lived in close proximity to an international border I have found the disinterest that I have observed from Windsorites to explore the intricacies of Detroit and vice versa to be peculiar. I am particularly interested in the exploration of popular misconceptions within this project as I believe they are something we are all fed from different sources as part of our inherent connection with Detroit. I am already aware of some of these more obvious misconceptions and I am interested to see if the same types of response will come from engaging with a wider pool of people (i.e the downtown city dweller). This project has helped to contextualize the everyday border experience by making us aware as observers of people's apprehensions about 'the other side' regardless of whichever side that may include.

Curatorial Statement Amelia

Detroit and Windsor have always had a connection. Since the two cities were founded, people have crossed as if it was one nation. For many years, people have had families on both sides, sharing commonalities. Today, Windsor is considered to be “Americanized.” In reference to Canadian stereotypes, we speak, act, and even look like Americans. We are heavily influenced through broadcast media. Windsorites seem to identify more closely with American radio and television. Perhaps most Windsorites favour the Detroit Red Wings over the Toronto Maple Leafs, or the Detroit Pistons over the Raptors, but does that really make us “Americanized?”

Curatorial Statement

Finn

Canadians have long-suffered from a debilitating inferiority complex due to geographic proximity to the United States. Our identity has been shaped solely by how we relate to our neighbouring nation: we are stereotyped as polite by virtue of living beside a dominant, outlandish country. In traveling the world and discussing this two-state relationship, I have determined that most nations are associated with and compare themselves to their nearest relative. Australia and New Zealand, for instance, behave much as Canada and the United States do. New Zealanders frequently find themselves diminished by Australia. Rarely does Canada or New Zealand's national identity stand alone without its impressive neighbour. By the same token, I have learned throughout this project that Canada identifies itself not by what it is, but by what the United States is not. Comparing Canada to the United States is much like comparing apples to oranges, but we do it anyway.

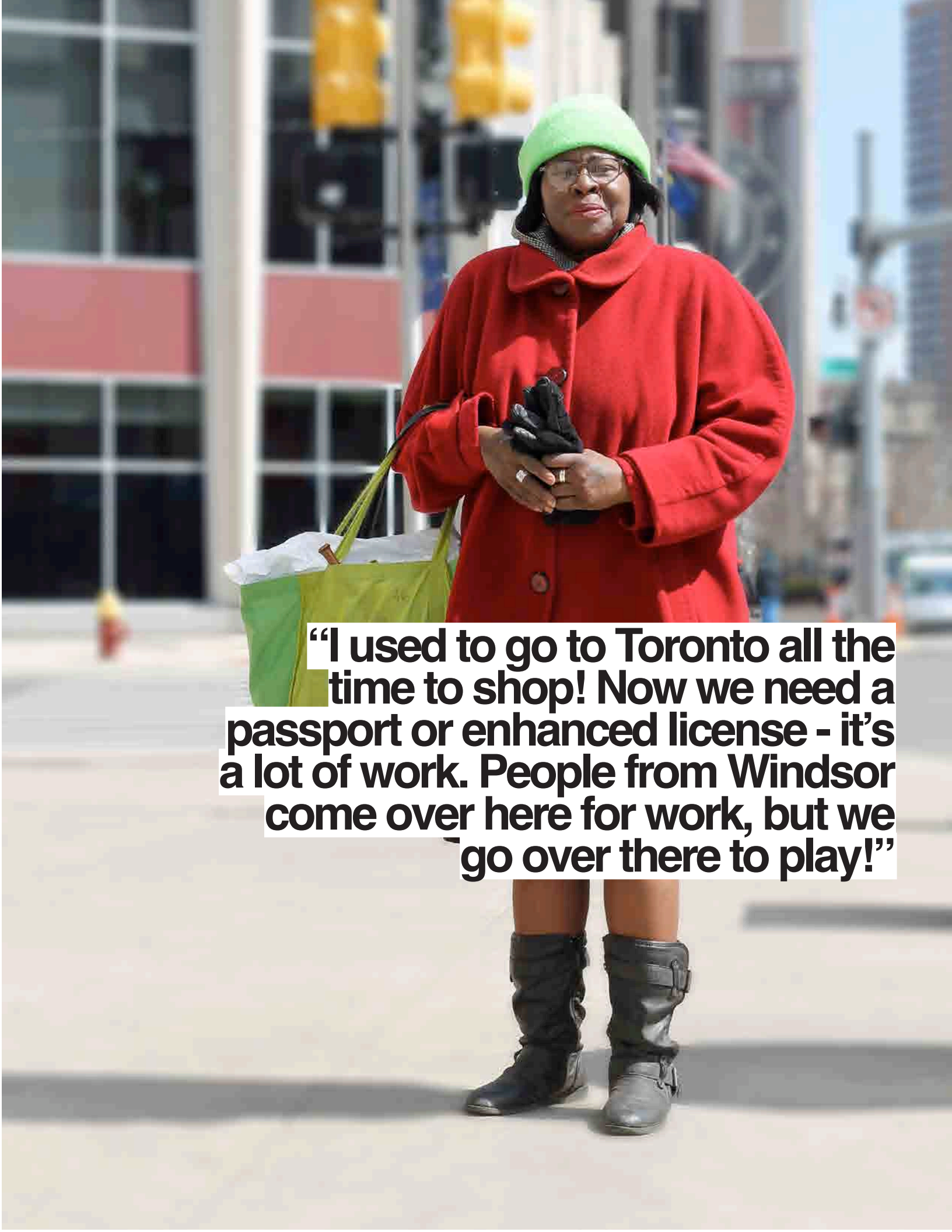
Interviews

We asked Windsorites and Detroiters in each downtown a series of border-centric questions. Our questions were not specific to either downtown or nationality. Our questions were designed to provoke answers that would offer insight into the human connections formed by living in an international setting. Our research is strictly observational and is not assumed to be a statistical benchmark, but rather an anthropological examination.


Each page features one American and one Canadian downtown border person, displayed without regional demarcations in order preserve ambiguity.



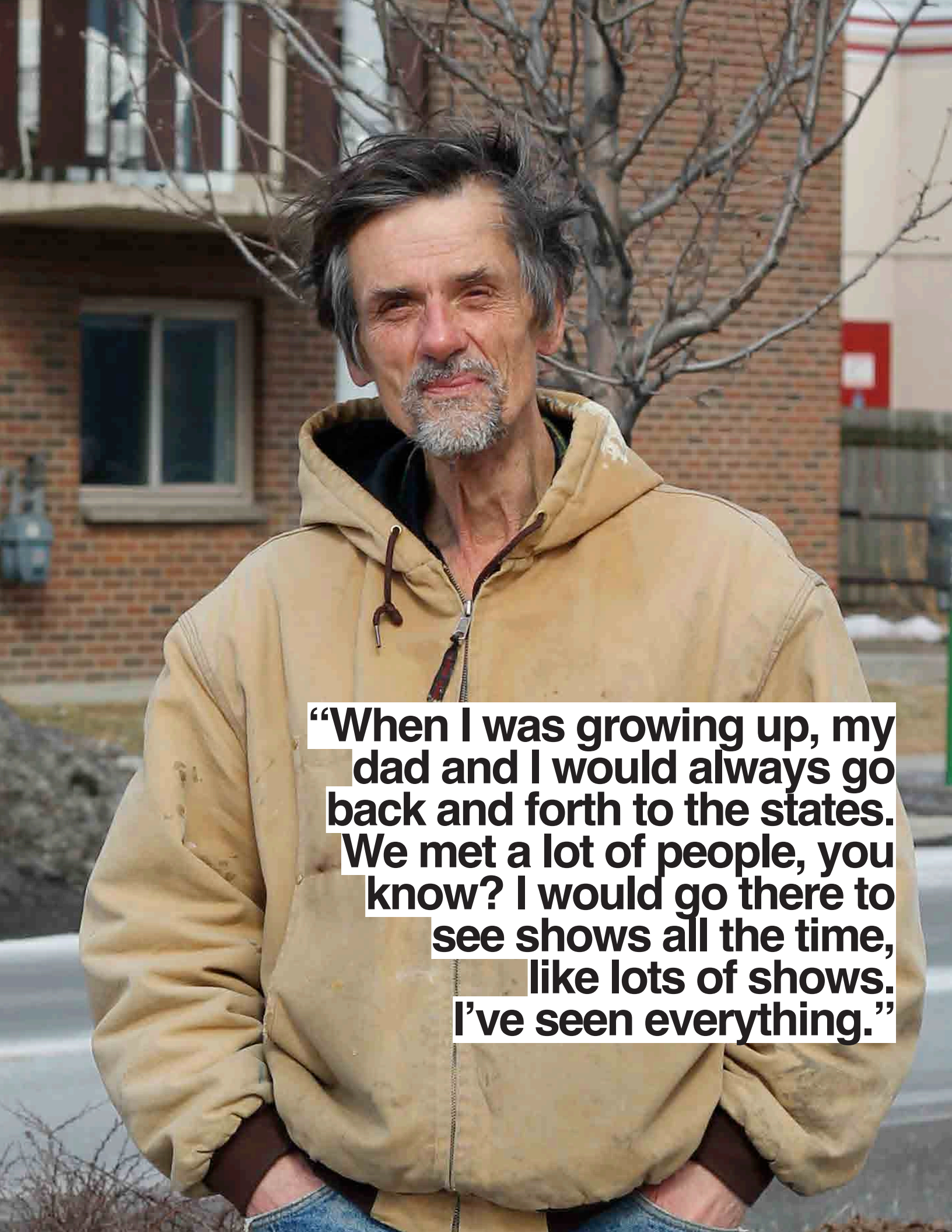
“There’s more to do in Detroit. I usually go downtown for concerts or games, and sometimes shopping. There isn’t really much to do in Windsor.”

A woman wearing a bright red coat, a neon green beanie, and glasses stands on a city street. She is holding a green shopping bag in her left hand and a pair of black gloves in her right hand. The background shows a blurred city street with traffic lights and buildings.


“I used to go to Toronto all the time to shop! Now we need a passport or enhanced license - it’s a lot of work. People from Windsor come over here for work, but we go over there to play!”



“We don’t visit Canada, except for the casino. We work downtown but live in the suburbs, so it’s a hassle to go to Windsor. Other than the border we don’t really have much in common.”

A middle-aged man with dark hair and a grey goatee is standing outdoors. He is wearing a tan, zip-up hoodie with a dark inner lining and blue jeans. He has his hands in his pockets and is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a neutral expression. The background consists of a brick building with a window and some bare tree branches.

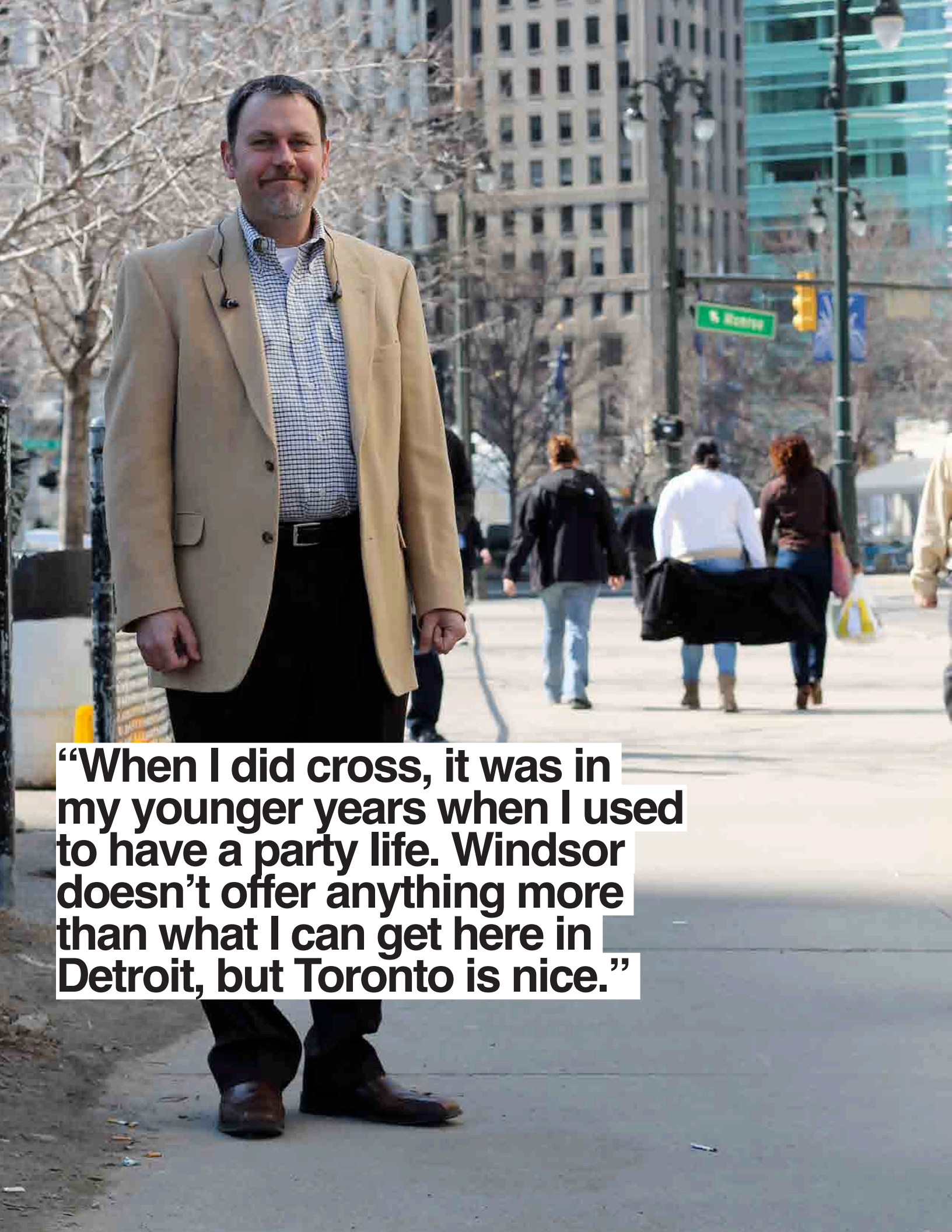
“When I was growing up, my dad and I would always go back and forth to the states. We met a lot of people, you know? I would go there to see shows all the time, like lots of shows. I’ve seen everything.”

A young man with glasses is wearing a dark winter jacket with a fur-lined hood. The hood is pulled up over his head, and a blue inner lining is visible. He is standing outdoors in a snowy environment, with a white truck and traffic lights visible in the background. The text is overlaid on the bottom half of the image.

“Living on the border has definitely affected me. If I had to pick a favourite sports team I’d say the Detroit Pistons. No, wait - The Toronto Raptors! When it comes to weather, I would normally use Celcius if it’s under 0 degrees, and Fahrenheit if it’s over 50.”



**“I got harassed last time I went over!
The guards pulled me in for no
reason. I mean, Windsor and
Detroit have been connected
since Prohibition!**

A man with a goatee, wearing a tan blazer over a checkered shirt and dark trousers, stands on a city sidewalk. In the background, there are tall buildings, bare trees, and other pedestrians. A green street sign is visible on a pole behind him. A white text box with a black border is overlaid on the bottom left of the image, containing a quote.

“When I did cross, it was in my younger years when I used to have a party life. Windsor doesn’t offer anything more than what I can get here in Detroit, but Toronto is nice.”



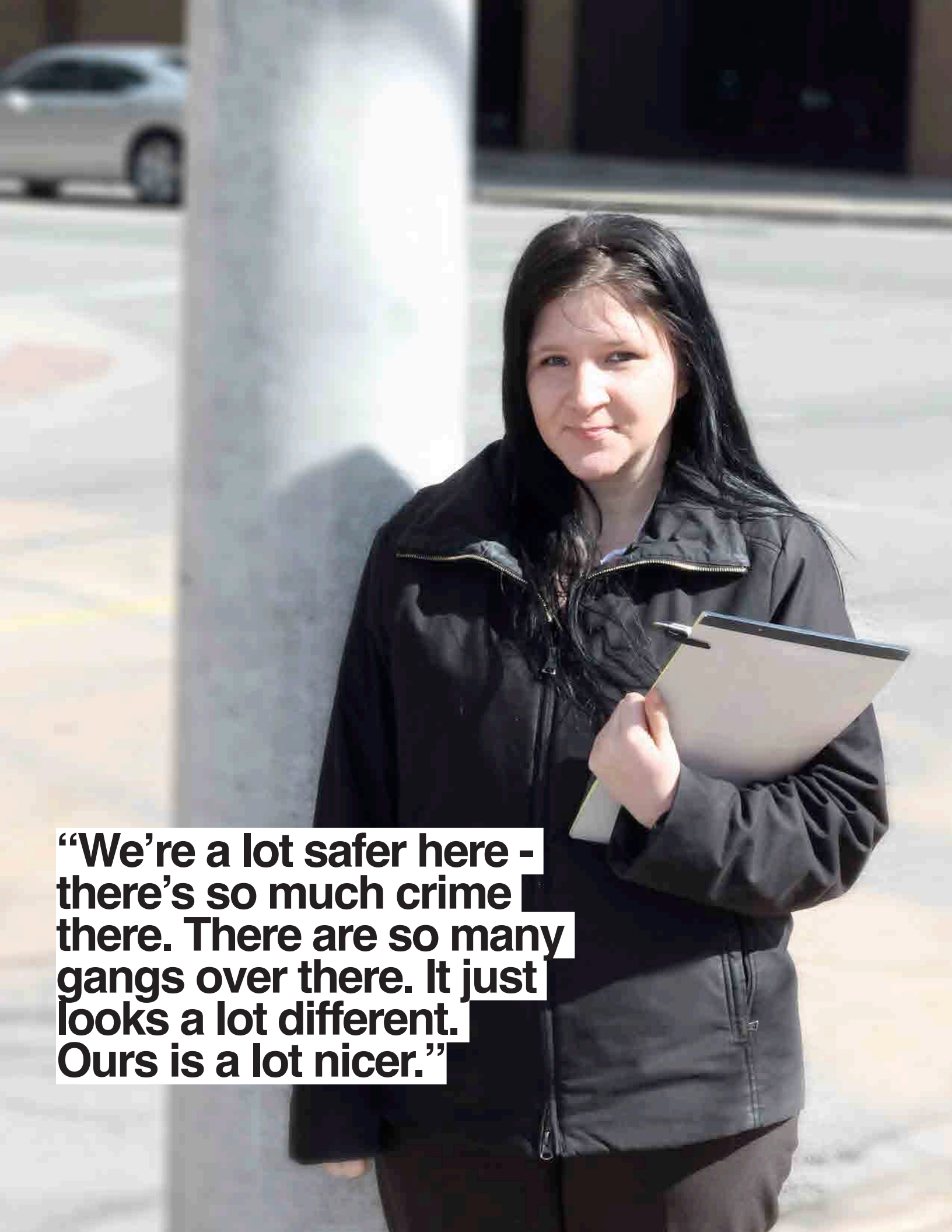
“I hear people in London, Ontario have accents. We’re Americanized - we listen to their radio, watch their TV.”



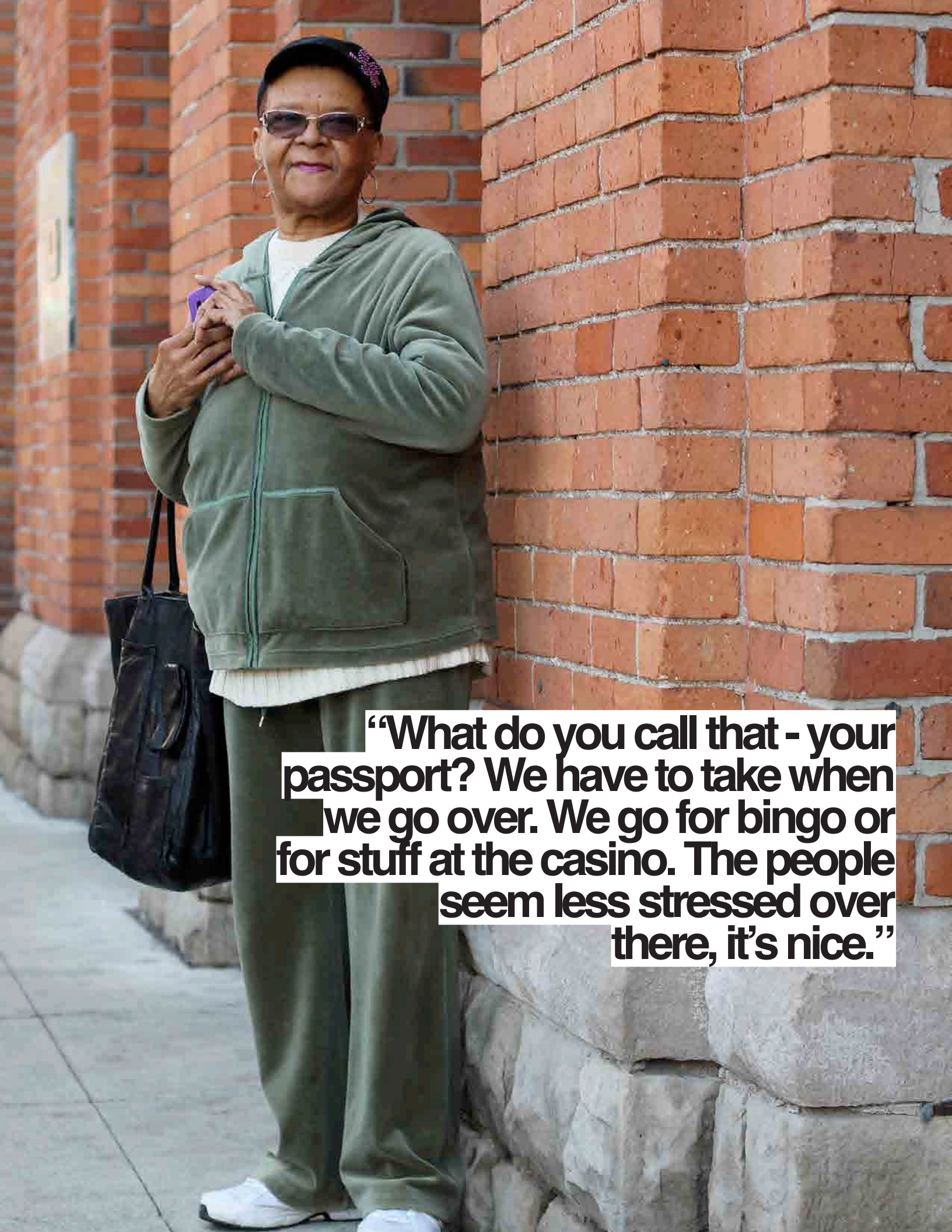
**“Come help us fight!
Tell Mr. Obama that
your Canadian
minimum wage is
higher! I think about
moving to
Canada a lot.”**



“I go over for shopping, but not much else. I find Detroit’s downtown intimidating, and sometimes dangerous.”

A woman with long black hair, wearing a black jacket, is standing outdoors. She is holding a clipboard and a pen. The background shows a concrete wall and a blurred car in the distance.

“We’re a lot safer here - there’s so much crime there. There are so many gangs over there. It just looks a lot different. Ours is a lot nicer.”



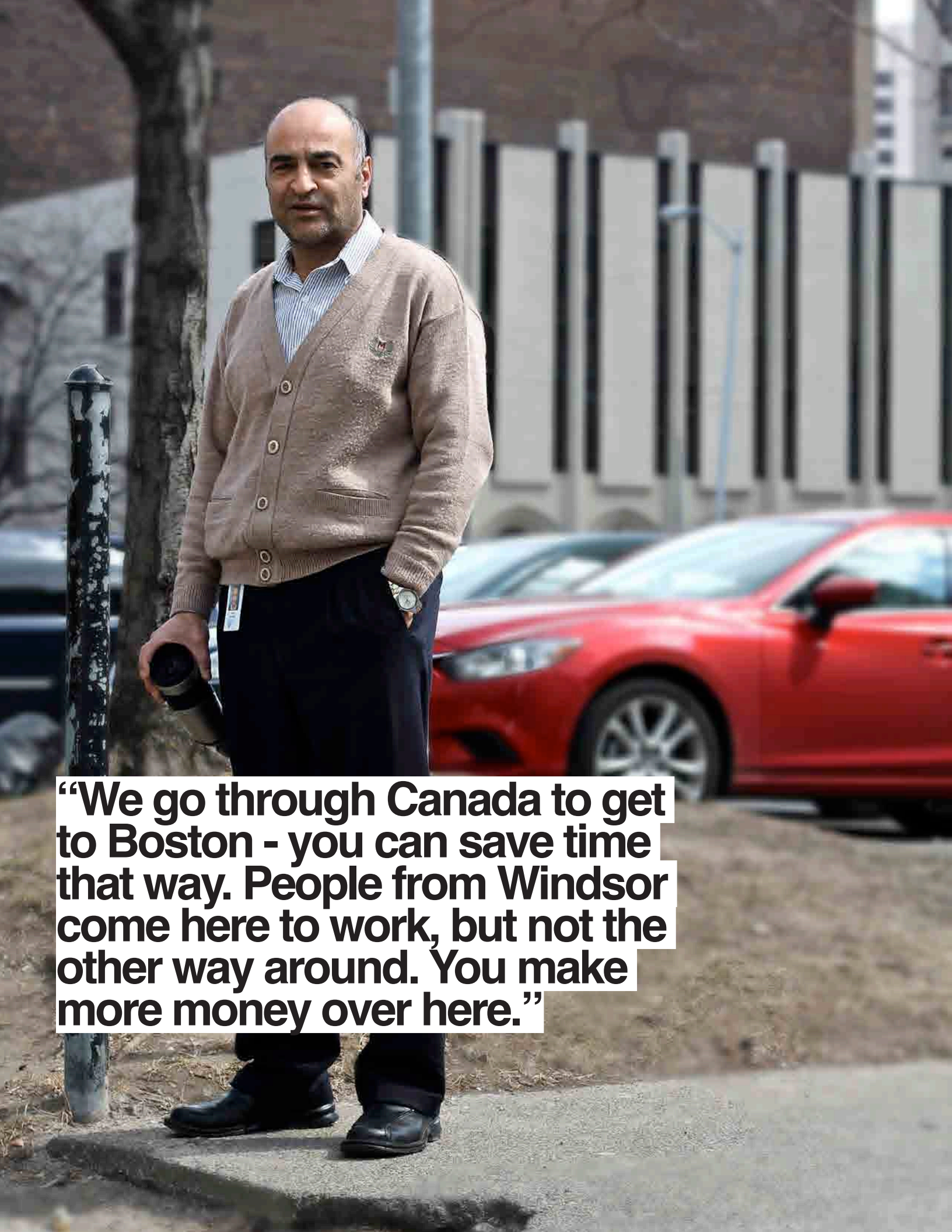
“What do you call that - your passport? We have to take when we go over. We go for bingo or for stuff at the casino. The people seem less stressed over there, it’s nice.”

A man with dark hair and sunglasses stands in a city park. He is wearing a dark brown suit jacket over a grey sweater and a red shirt, with matching dark brown trousers and brown loafers. He has his hands in his pockets and is looking towards the camera. The background shows a city street with buildings, trees, and a bench.

“Canadians are perceived as more friendly but they’re just more passive. I used to play sports with Canadian guys and they were no more polite than the Americans.”



“It seems like there a lot less people living downtown there. I don’t go over there at all. I haven’t been since I was a kid.”



“We go through Canada to get to Boston - you can save time that way. People from Windsor come here to work, but not the other way around. You make more money over here.”

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a black quilted jacket, stands outdoors in a city setting. She is holding a pink folder under her left arm and a grey wallet in her right hand. The background is blurred, showing buildings and a street. A white text box is overlaid on the lower part of the image.


“I’ve never bought a pair of shoes in Windsor. I always buy them in over there!”

A woman with short, light-colored hair is sitting outdoors. She is wearing a bright blue short-sleeved top with a pattern of gold and brown circular motifs and red pants. She is holding a yellow lottery ticket in her left hand. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with some structures and trees.

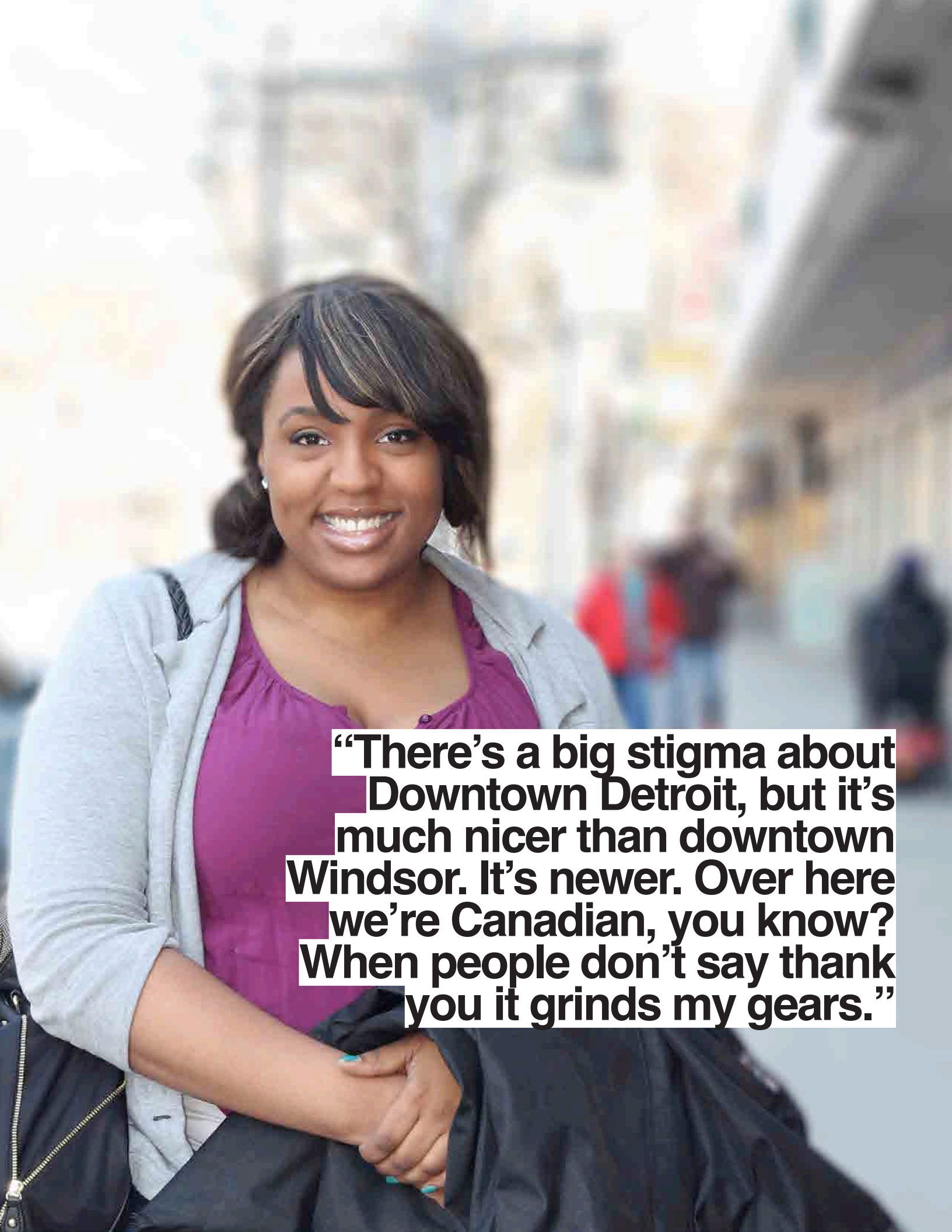
“My daughter lives somewhere down in the states, but I don’t visit her. I just sit here and do this.”



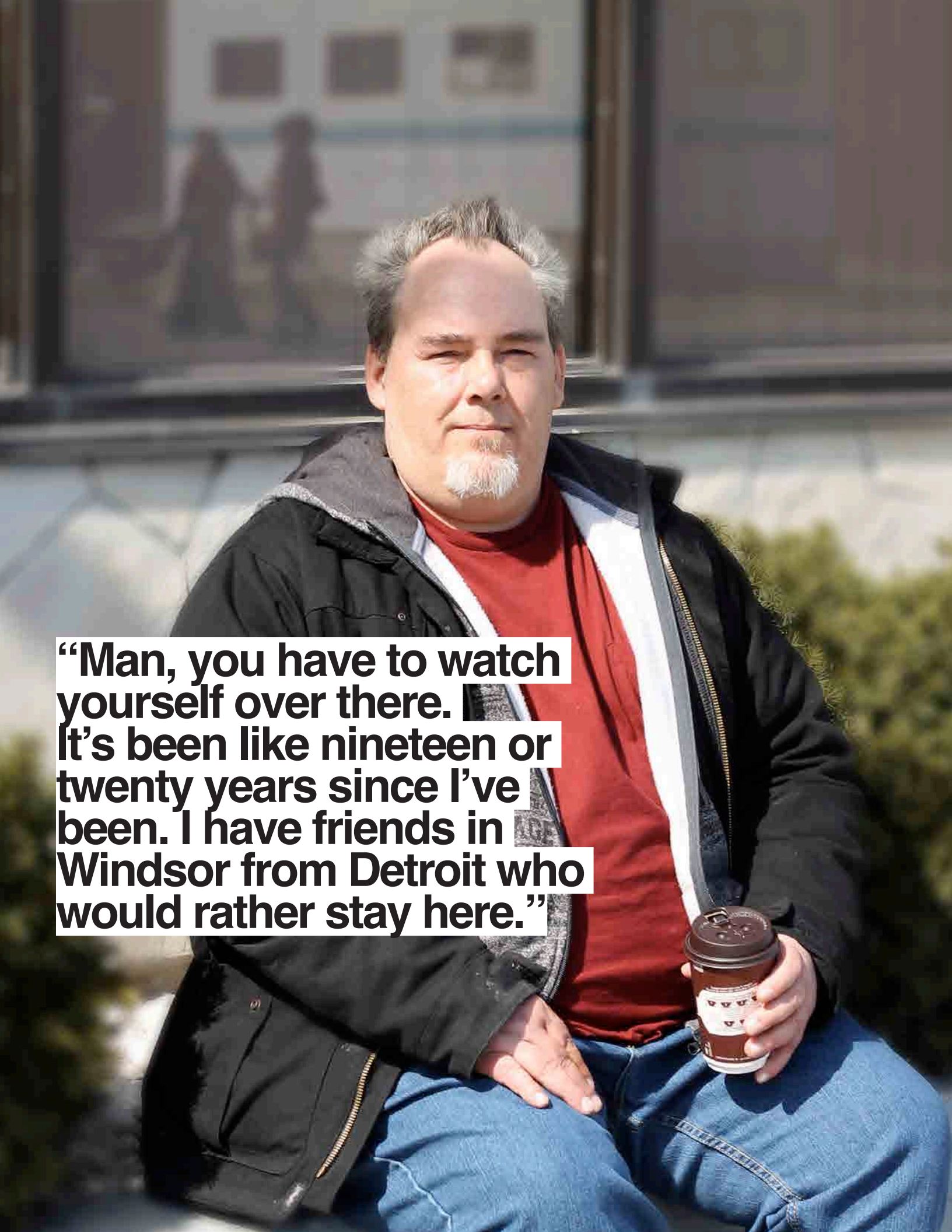
“My company offers us cash incentives to live downtown. I haven’t heard much about that happening in Windsor.”

A man is standing on a city sidewalk, looking towards the camera. He is wearing a tan suit jacket, light-colored trousers, and brown leather shoes. He also wears a dark blue baseball cap with a white 'D' logo and sunglasses. His hands are in his jacket pockets. The background shows a city street with buildings and traffic lights.

**“You can’t smoke
inside in Canada,
so I go to the casino
there a lot. It feels
cleaner over there
and Canadians
are nicer.”**




“There’s a big stigma about Downtown Detroit, but it’s much nicer than downtown Windsor. It’s newer. Over here we’re Canadian, you know? When people don’t say thank you it grinds my gears.”

A man with a goatee, wearing a black jacket and a red t-shirt, is sitting outdoors. He is holding a coffee cup in his left hand. The background shows a building with windows and some greenery.

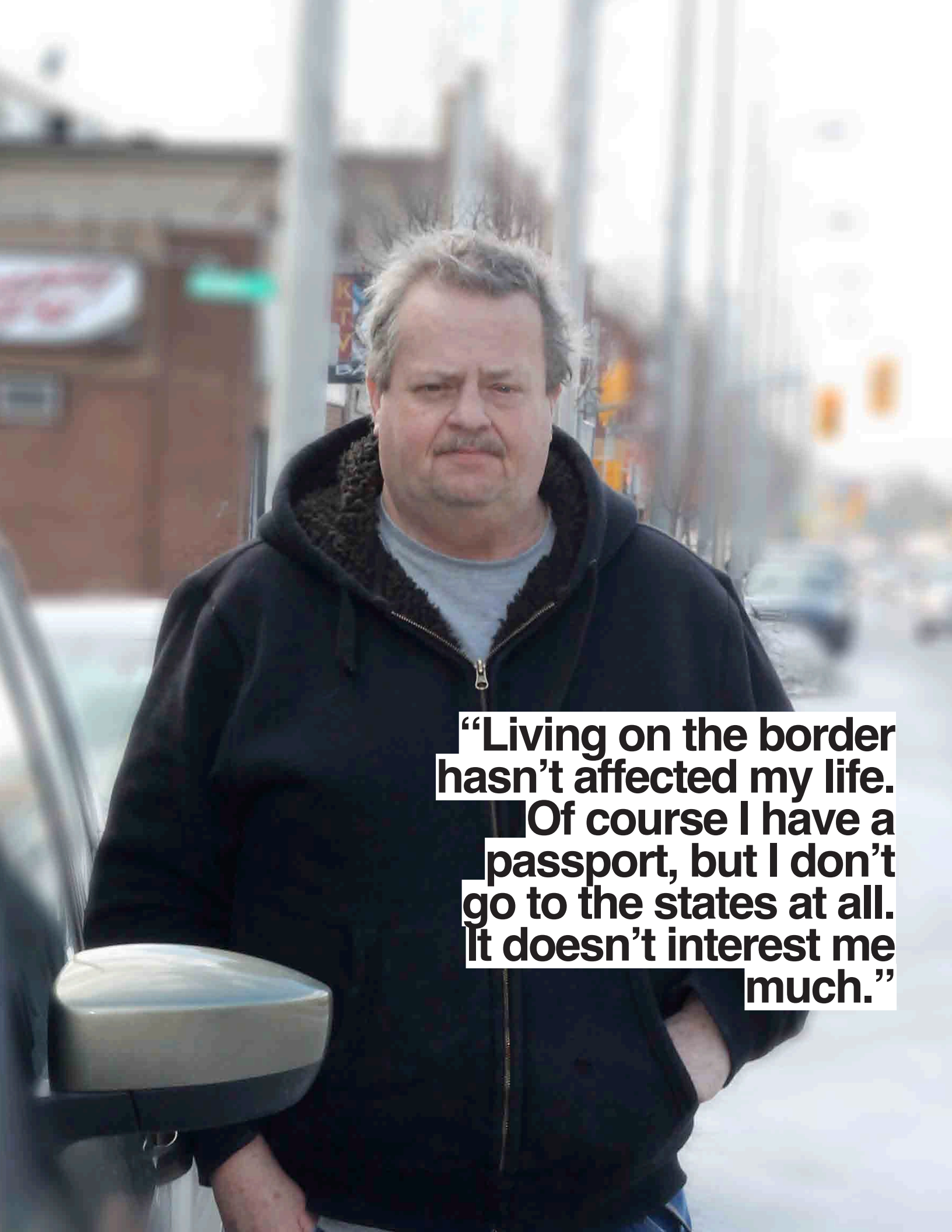
“Man, you have to watch yourself over there. It’s been like nineteen or twenty years since I’ve been. I have friends in Windsor from Detroit who would rather stay here.”




“Windsor has a great nightlife - I go over all the time! Detroit is vibrant, but Windsor is a great place to escape after a long week at work.”

A photograph of two women sitting on a metal bench outdoors. The woman on the left has blonde hair, wears sunglasses, a purple long-sleeved shirt, and dark pants. The woman on the right has dark hair, wears a black jacket and black pants. They are both smiling. The background shows a city street with bare trees, a traffic light, and a sign that says "LEFT TURN MUST BE FOR LEFT".

“People are moving back downtown in the hundreds. Downtown is so lively right now - everything we need is right here. I only go over to Windsor for the nightlife.”



“Living on the border hasn’t affected my life. Of course I have a passport, but I don’t go to the states at all. It doesn’t interest me much.”



“I always considered it normal to measure the weather in Fahrenheit. I never really thought of it as an American thing. I’d say it’s about forty degrees today.”

A photograph of two young women standing outdoors on a paved area. The woman on the left has long red hair, is wearing a black baseball cap with 'STANCO' in red, a black short-sleeved shirt, black shorts, and black polka-dot tights with black boots. She is carrying a black bag. The woman on the right has long dark hair, is wearing a purple and black baseball cap, a black hoodie, and black boots. She is holding a camera on a white tripod. A purple and black plaid jacket is draped over the tripod. The background shows a blurred building and a street.

“I’m from Toronto but I live in Detroit. It’s definitely more lively and diverse in Toronto. I think that a lot of people go to Windsor to party - it’s like an extension of Detroit.”



“I have me a passport and criminal record so I can’t cross anymore. I was honest with them Canadians about my record. I can trust them, they’re my friends!”

**“You can’t take my picture,
I’m a federal officer.”**

**“I used to work on the Mexican
border and now I’m in Detroit.
The view is a lot friendlier when
you look from the office. The
relationship here is better than
any other border crossing.”**

Findings

Based on our research we have found that a wide array of popular misconceptions on each side of the border have helped the border to maintain its function as a dividing line. These misconceptions have consequently left the people of the downtown borders feeling disconnected from each other. By virtue of proximity, Windsor and Detroit are intrinsically connected. The post 9/11 experience of border crossings has left people on each side of the border feeling anxious about the border experience. Neither population from our pool of participants makes much of an overall effort to dispel these myths. Consequently the populations feel isolated from one and other in our post 9/11 border societies. As a result the cities have inherited 'personalities', our participants identified Windsor as a place of pleasure and relaxation and Detroit as a place of work. We have observed through our research that most people who used to make frequent border crossings 15-20 years ago now avoid crossing at all due to the recent post 9/11 developments at the border and increase in security.

Several participants agreed that Canadians are perceived to be 'friendlier.' Despite this, we found that our Detroit participants were more willing to engage in meaningful discussions about their city. Each population has developed a distinct set of popular misconceptions about the 'sister' city as described by one of our participants. These popular misconceptions touched on topics of cleanliness, safety, and an overall assumption of the attitude of those from 'the other side'. Often we found these misconceptions to be conflicting. As an example, we found participants from Detroit who felt Windsor was the cleaner city, on the contrary those from Windsor had similar feelings about Detroit. We noted that these misconceptions are often so heavily engrained in our populations that neither population from our pool of participants makes much of an overall effort to dispel these myths. Consequently, the populations feel isolated from one and other in our post 9/11 border societies. As a result the cities have inherited 'personalities:' our participants identified Windsor as a place of pleasure and relaxation while Detroit was identified as a place of work.