



Ron MacLean,

My name is Aquil Virani and I'm a Canadian visual artist, currently based in Toronto and Ottawa. For my 30th birthday, I'm writing 30 letters to people who have inspired me throughout my life. You are one of those people.

The project a simple and fun experiment to reach out to old and new friends and share good vibes during a tough time. I am posting some of my letters publicly and keeping others more private. I plan to display this letter on my artist website. You can learn more about the project at aquil.ca/30letters.

I do realize I am substantially less cute than a six-year-old writing to you. I would nonetheless love to hear back from you, even just to confirm you've received this letter. I've included a ready-to-go envelope in case you have a second to write "Happy Birthday, Aquil!" on a sticky note. I'm reachable by email too, of course.

As I write this, the new NHL season is beginning. I'd imagine you're excited to get back into the swing of things. I do question whether the NHL is an essential service worth accommodating in such a dire time, but I will nonetheless tune in and enjoy the the sense of normalcy and excitement that broadcasted hockey brings.

I grew up in Surrey, BC, watching Hockey Night in Canada practically every Saturday. My two immigrant parents (Indian and French, respectively) didn't fully understand my interest, but as a kid, I played street hockey daily on my rollerblades with the other kids in a mostly Sikh and Punjabi neighbourhood. We were always riding aboard the West Coast Express. I ran around the house in my underwear when Scott Oake read off my submitted question to Roberto Luongo on After Hours.

I always appreciated the humility and sense of fairness you championed on-screen, sometimes in subtle ways. I admired your ability to guide the discussion, clarify concepts, and ask good follow-up questions. It's amazing to me to think back at how small moments - like apologizing for mis-speaking - modelled moral leadership in such a subtle way. Just by being your honest self. It has never been a surprise to me that you have a background as a referee.

As an adult now - with an ability to see the complexity of the NHL at the intersection of capitalism, community and culture - I also want to thank you for apologizing after Don's comments in 2019. As a young person of colour growing up in Surrey, I noticed the undertones of his comments even as a kid. It took me until my adult days to recognize and articulate the discomfort I felt watching him make confident claims steeped in xenophobia and (what I would call) toxic masculinity. It was clear that the situation was difficult for you, personally. I think you did the right thing and I want to thank you for that.

Strombo said in an interview with you and Don, I believe, that "you're a tender guy." I think we need a bit more of that in hockey culture. So thank you for what you bring to our living rooms.

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