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**Kitchener-Waterloo**

## **Local playwright tackles discrimination, bigotry through comedy**

'Transit' debuts at 2022 Guelph Fringe Festival

CBC News

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Artwork for play 'Transit' set to be performed at Guelph Fringe Festival August 4-7th (Submitted by Susan Brown)

When was the last time you were confronted with your own biases? Reflected on discriminatory thoughts? Addressed ignorant ideas or stereotypes?

Those are the kinds of questions local playwright Susan Brown hopes to raise with her new play *Transit*.

"I really want to make people look at their familiar community spaces that might now seem unfamiliar to them because of cultural and multicultural changes. And to see them as opportunities to connect and find what's common between us," Brown said.

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*Transit* centres around a life-long friendship between two older white men, Frank and Ernie, and how they navigate the ever-changing cultural landscape around them.

When Frank's local coffee shop is bought by a Muslim brother and sister, Frank is left with feelings of racial intolerance. Unwilling to budge, Frank's bigotry threatens and tests his friendship with Ernie, who tries to help Frank become more tolerant and embrace change.

"I was really cognizant of my own identity and my place in the world and how my creative process had to include a practice of cultural sensitivity," Brown said.





ethnic characters in my play. It wasn't done deliberately, but it was a product of my own ignorance."

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Brown says she wrote *Transit* after she was confronted with her own unconscious biases at the changing cultural landscape she saw happening in the region.

"As a playwright, I had to relate to Frank. And in many ways, it was autobiographical because as I sat there wondering about my own coffee shop, I couldn't deny the fact that these things were feelings of my own," she said.

But talking about race and discrimination is a hard topic to tackle, especially through drama said Brown. So she opted to write a play that weaves humour in.

"Humour offered me an opportunity to disarm the audience. It introduces and talks about issues that we sometimes close ourselves off to," she said.

"I wanted people to be less defensive about these places that are changing all the time in their neighbourhoods. And hopefully, if I did my job right, there'll be some easy guilt free laughter, and then there'll be some humour that should make all of us a little uncomfortable and hopefully introspective."

Ultimately, Brown hopes the audience recognizes Frank's struggles to adapt as a shared struggle and that they reflect on "ignorance and uncertainty about change and difference."

The Guelph Fringe Festival runs Aug. 4 to 7. *Transit* is on Friday night at 8 p.m., Saturday at 6:30 p.m. and Sunday at 4 p.m. The three performances will be at Silence Sounds, 46 Essex St. in Guelph.

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