



# FULL DISCLOSURE

## Is Jane & Finch Truly 'Canada's Darkest' Neighbourhood? - Part 1

3/13/2018

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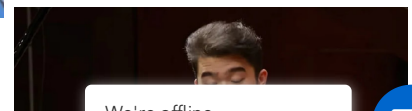
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trickledown effect on the general public, allowing the community's bright spots to be left in the dark.

In order to tackle this issue, VIBE 105 speaks with prominent members of the Jane and Finch community. They **share with us the many great aspects of the community**, and tell us how the neighbourhood promotes and produces all kind of culture and creative projects.

In this VIBE TALKS interview, Correspondent Amin Fereg talks to Paul Nguyen, founder of Jane-Finch.com. As a pioneer for **using the internet to amplify alternative voices**, Paul's insight about the past, present and future of Jane and Finch is eye opening.



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Created in 2004, the website became a staple within the Jane and Finch community, providing a platform in which residence or anyone interested in the communities affairs, can visit and be creative work. As well as news reports from people actually from the neighbourhood.



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**Paul:** I was born in Toronto. I grew up in the Jane and Finch area, still live there. My parents are boat people, meaning that they escaped the Vietnam War and settled in Toronto. I went to school in the area, and ended up going to York University. In 2004 **I created a website called Jane-Finch.com** to fight the negative stereotypes in the area, and it's got a lot of attention ever since.

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### Amin: What's the main reason you felt the need to start Jane-Finch.com?

**Paul:** Growing up in the neighbourhood you're kind of used to it, whatever stuff's happening, whether it's local crime, **it's desensitized**. Anyway, once you start growing up, making friends outside of the neighbourhood, you realize: **"Oh my neighbourhood is kind of unique."** We have things that other places don't have which is a lot of **negative media attention**, and I realized a lot of people had negative perceptions of Jane and Finch, and they think the kids there are into gangs or they're all bad. And I wanted to show a positive side of Jane and Finch. One day I just started [searching] the internet to see [what was out there], and back then there was no Instagram, no Twitter, none of that stuff right? Jane and Finch was kind of well-known in the news and I [searched] it and I couldn't find anything. I was like maybe I'll be the guy to start something. So initially when I started the website we just kind of promoted the local artists and rappers and we did music videos, those kind of things.

### Amin: So how do you feel the Jane and Finch perception was in the media then as opposed to today, or after you made the website?

**Paul:** I think back then the media was not as careful as today. So back then you would have some issue happening in the area, but not quite at Jane and Finch, but still labelled Jane and Finch. Jane and Finch was just the blanket name, like the marquee name on a poster. So it kind of created that aura of Jane and Finch that says: **"Oh when something goes wrong, it's always Jane and Finch."** So I think now with these days with new reporters coming up and we have former Jane and Finch residents who are actually leading news, like Dwight Drummond, well known guy, and he used to live down the street from me. He was one of the first guys who did a story on my site, and now he's the anchor of CBC 6, big time man now. So we have people who are more aware and more sensitive, and I think they're just reporting more accurately, and not just adding details and stuff. But we still have ways to go and I wouldn't just put any or all the blame on the media, **public perception plays a big, big, role**. So media just plays one part, but we have to do our role as residents or students in the area to show that there's more to Jane and Finch than what you hear in the news. They have to report if there's something wrong, it's a problem? But not blame it on the

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**Amin: Do you feel that the new form of alternative journalism made even more change in the perception of the area?**

**Paul:** I think it's important. We reach locals but we also reach people outside of the community. I've had people approach me, to help them on projects, like researchers from other countries. One person was **from the Netherlands**, and their doing a research project about multiculturalism and entrepreneurship, and they end up at Jane and Finch. It's how does the Netherlands know about Jane and Finch? We're world wide right? I think it's important that we have these **new platforms, and people have the power in their own hands** now and they can be the authors of their own voices. It's important Jane-Finch started the movement back then, but now we have Facebook, and Twitter and, all these new social media platforms, and there's new voices out there, and I hope it continues, and **more people tell the Jane and Finch story to the public.**

**Amin: Is there any grants or any financial aid that's provided by the government, the municipal level that helps with some initiatives for**

over the years. It's a volunteer passion; they're **really serious about changing the image** of the neighbourhood, but also it's a good way to gain professional skills. We've had people who volunteer for the website and win major awards and they're able to use that to **find good work or help other people, get into school**, and do all these kind of things. It's a great way to gain experience. When I created the website, I always encourage the young kids: "Don't let the money or lack of resources be a barrier!" You can do whatever you want, if you think you're a journalist. You can just go call up anybody and try to interview them. When we started the website back in the day I just contacted Maestro Fresh Wes, who was a big rapper back in the day before Drake; he was the guy back then. And he didn't hesitate, he actually drove himself all the way to Jane and Finch, and we filmed the interview in my friend's basement, so that's how hardcore he is. So if you have a way to reach out to people like Drake or whoever, just say hey I'm doing this blog about my neighbourhood I want to interview you and you'll be surprised that a lot of people will respond positively.



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**Amin:** When you were talking about the recognition from the other people, I failed to mention that you yourself have won a lot of awards for your initiatives within the Jane and Finch community. One that stands out for me particularly is the Diamond Jubilee award, which is very prestigious for any Canadian to receive. What did that award feel like for the Jane and Finch community when you did receive it?

**Paul:** At the time I thought it was a cool thing, but I realized it comes with some **responsibility**. You don't just have the medal, walking around showing off, that's not the purpose. The purpose is

**advantage.** So instead of saying: "Oh, I'm from Jane and Finch, I can't do this I can't do that." I used it myself to show I'm from Jane and Finch, but **I can do a lot with it.** And my unique experiences I can share it with the world, and touch people, and change minds, and connect with people, and make positive things happen.

**Amin: So during earlier times working with Jane-Finch.com where there any community organizations or groups that you collaborated with often, to help get out the message more easily?**

**Paul:** We did collaborate with different organizations throughout the years, I can't remember them, and some of the stuff might be listed online. We also collaborate with a lot of organizations that are not from Jane and Finch, national type projects. What we do is we try to be just the **voice of the community**, so if someone has initiative we'll help them promote it. We used to offer a lot of free advertising, free listings, maybe we'll tweet out things, or provide video coverage to show, hey someone else is doing good and we want to show it to the rest of the world online.



they're responding to the whole stigmatization as of now:

**Paul:** I've been **contacted by many people** over the years outside of, not even the city, but the province, the country, other people from different countries, and I think that basically the website helps open their eyes. So they might have heard of Jane and Finch on the news, and they would have the stereotypes in their mind. But when they visit the website you see videos of different cultures celebrating their traditions, young people, artists, whether they're musicians, or poets or writers, or reporters and you see a thriving young group of people working together of different backgrounds and different colours. It's kind of like almost a role model of an ideal society. So people see and they say: "Holy smokes!" Maybe their country or wherever they're coming from, there is **racial tension**. But they can see through the website that yes we are working together, and we're of different backgrounds and we don't discriminate against anyone and people see that as a good model to follow.

### Amin: So where can the viewers find you for your social media?

**Paul:** If you want to look up me, just go to Jane-Finch.com, and my cell phone is there, it's been there for 10 years and you can just ring me up. For more info, please visit our [website](#).

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