An aerial photograph of a winding road with yellow double lines, set against a teal background. The road curves through a landscape with trees and grass. The text is overlaid on the image.

# 7th COUSINS

an automythography

ERIN BRUBACHER  
& CHRISTINE BRUBAKER

# 7th COUSINS

An Automythography

Erin Brubacher and Christine Brubaker

Book\*hug Press

TORONTO

## FIRST EDITION

copyright © 2019 by Erin Brubacher and Christine Brubaker  
text on pages 112–115 copyright © 2019 by Erum Khan  
Endnotes, or, A Talkback on pages 170–174 © 2019 by Christopher Stanton and Andrea Nann

Journey Gesture photographs on pages 44–51 by Samuel Choisy, choreographed by Andrea Nann; production photographs on page 78 and page 99 by Sophia Wolfe, taken at PushOFF; all other photographs by Erin Brubacher. Used with permission.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

*Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication*

Title: 7th cousins : an automythography / Erin Brubacher and Christine Brubaker.

Other titles: Seventh cousins

Names: Brubacher, Erin, 1979– author. | Brubaker, Christine, author.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20190199466 | Canadiana (ebook) 20190199474 | ISBN 9781771665469 (softcover) | ISBN 9781771665476 (HTML) | ISBN 9781771665483 (PDF) | ISBN 9781771665490 (Kindle)

Subjects: LCSH: Brubacher, Erin, 1979—Travel—Northeastern States. | LCSH: Brubaker, Christine—Travel—Northeastern States. | LCSH: Women performance artists—Travel—Northeastern States. | LCSH: Women performance artists—Canada—Biography. | LCSH: Northeastern States—Description and travel. | LCSH: Hiking—Northeastern States. | LCSH: Hospitality—Northeastern States.

Classification: LCC F106 .B78 2019 | DDC 917.404/44—dc23

Printed in Canada

The production of this book was made possible through the generous assistance of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council. Book\*hug Press also acknowledges the support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund and the Government of Ontario through the Ontario Book Publishing Tax Credit and the Ontario Book Fund.



Canada Council  
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts  
du Canada



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL  
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO  
an Ontario government agency  
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

Canada



ONTARIO | ONTARIO  
CREATES | CRÉATIF

Book\*hug Press acknowledges that the land on which we operate is the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. We recognize the enduring presence of many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and are grateful for the opportunity to meet and work on this territory.

Dear reader,

Welcome.

This is a book about a walk. It is also a book documenting a performance about a walk. Some of our collaborators have commented in endnotes in this book. Reading these might feel something like the chaos and magic of being in our rehearsal hall—you'll have some of the process in your hands.

At the beginning of every performance, we greet the audience and offer them something to eat and drink. In a bar, beer. In a church, homemade pie. In an Ismaili centre, masala chai. We try to offer something that suits the place where we are performing. So now, reader, we'd like to invite you to fix yourself something that might bring you pleasure or comfort in this moment, wherever you are. A glass of water, a stiff drink, some leftovers, a bowl of pretzels, a cup of tea, an espresso . . . When you're ready, come back and reopen the book where you left off:

Here.

On the next pages, you will see a collection of images from our seven-hundred-kilometre walk. Pick one. Hold it in your mind.

Welcome.





*EB and CB welcome and greet audience members as they enter. They offer each person something: a “hosting” gesture—as one might do when an invited guest first enters a home.*

*CB and EB invite the audience to look through seven hundred photos—spread out on tables around the room—from their thirty-two-day journey on foot. Each guest is invited to select a photo they will keep with them during the performance. After a time, the audience members take their seats, which are set up in a circle.*

*There are two kilometre markers, like highway signs, on tall stanchions, that read “0 km” and “700 km.” They are positioned at either side of an opening in the audience circle. Also in the room: a document camera, two projection surfaces, two sets of headphones attached to cellphones, two speakers, two stacks of postcards, two stacks of kilometre markers, two sets of name tags, and more empty metal stanchions of varying heights, positioned around and beyond the perimeter of the audience circle.<sup>1</sup> EB and CB stand, side by side, between the markers for 0 kilometres and 700 kilometres.*

**CB**

Okay. Well.<sup>2</sup> In July 2015, Erin and I walked seven hundred kilometres.

**EB**

We walked from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to Waterloo, Ontario, tracing the migration of our Mennonite ancestors.

**CB**

It took us thirty-two days.

**EB**

We took three days off.

**CB**

People asked us why we were walking. I asked myself that all the time.

**EB**

Someone asked me if we were walking to learn how to work together. I liked that.

**CB**

We stayed with people we found through a paper directory called *Mennonite Your Way*—it’s like Mennonite couch-surfing.

*CB picks up a copy of the directory and shows it around.*

**EB**

It only exists like that, on paper. You can’t get it online. I called most of these people. Some of them don’t even have email. Or never check. Although I did get one email reply a full year after the walk.<sup>3</sup>

Every meal with people . . .

**CB**

New people all the time . . .

*EB and CB glance at each other<sup>4</sup> as they sit, in simple matching kitchen-table chairs, and perform the first five Table Gestures. The Table Gestures are a sequence of twenty-six physical actions paired with the names of individuals, spoken aloud, who hosted CB and EB along the walk.<sup>5</sup>*

**EB/CB**

Carolyn and Ralph  
Linda  
Anne  
Hannah  
Patricia and Elton—

*Shift*

**EB**

Who has a photo they want us to remember?

*Audience members volunteer their photos, which they've chosen from among the seven hundred photos of the walk. EB collects three of them.<sup>6</sup>*

*For the Photo Game, both CB and EB have to "remember" photos through spontaneous improvisation. They use a document camera to project the images, so that everyone in the room sees each image at the same time.*

**EB**

Christine has two minutes to remember these three photos. And, while I might very much like to, I'm not allowed to say a single word about it.

*(To CB)* Don't look yet.<sup>7</sup>

*EB hands the three images over to CB and sets a timer for two minutes. CB sits at the document camera, where she can control the display of each image, deciding for herself how much of the two minutes she wants to speak about each photo, while EB acts as timekeeper, sitting in another part of the room, watching.*

*(The improvisation below is transcribed from a performance on Saturday, June 9, 2018, at Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, Ontario.)*

**EB**

Two minutes, three photos. Don't look yet... Ready? Go!

**CB**

All right... Oh!... Okay... Uh... great. Great... this is a... place...



um... It's, uh, it's a home in the middle of a tiny town which we totally got lost trying to find, and Google totally let us down—this town, which is really about four houses, as far as we could tell. And this is the home built by a couple we stayed with, and in this house... Well, his wife had basically built it, and in the house, it was *full* of tchotchkes from everywhere—

**EB**

One minute,  
thirty seconds.



**CB**

—as she was, basically, like this crazy online shopper. She would buy things, stuff from all over North America, and so everywhere you turned, there was like... uh... a collection of antique spices... or, uh... or a bunny area... or dog porcelain things... It was, like, packed! It was this kinda crazy, strange museum to collectordom... and even their fridge was filled with things she would collect, like water bottles, like tons! And ketchups—

**EB**  
One minute!

**CB**  
Okay...uh...  
Wow, who picked  
this photo?  
Yeah...this is...  
this is Erin and I  
in various states of  
undress at the end  
of the day. And

we...yeah...we are drinking something that you'll hear about later...  
we call "clandestine beers." We basically just walked one of our  
longest days...and I think we had walked about ten hours and we  
were going to the town of Selingsgrove, but on the way there, we had  
stopped in this other little town...called Halifax, yeah...and Erin,  
who loves beer, bought these beers, and we carried them for hours in  
our backpacks, and by the time we got to Selingsgrove, they were  
warm—

**EB**  
Thirty seconds!

**CB**  
—so when we got to our host's place, I begged them for ice, telling  
them it was for our feet, but in fact—yeah... We put the ice in our  
beers and we drank them...

**CB**  
Okay. This! This...is actually a really beautiful place called the  
Pennsylvania Grand Canyon. And this is at the very top of a...the



canyon, in a  
campground  
where we  
stayed that  
was  
completely  
abandoned.  
No one was  
in there.  
And we had  
forged a



river the day before and we had started hiking, and we were both kind of nervous 'cause people had talked about bears, and sure enough, as we're hiking along we see three baby bears on one side of us, and then we're looking around for the mother and we had no idea where she was, and anyway, Erin had been trying to get me to sing the whole trip... and all of a sudden I actually burst into song...

*The timer goes off. EB's turn.*

**CB**

Who has a photo? Who has a photo they want Erin to remember?

*EB and CB switch positions and the game is repeated. Some audience members volunteer their photos, and CB collects three. (The improvisation below is transcribed from a performance on Sunday, September 24, 2017, at St. Matthew's United Church in Toronto.)*

**CB**

Erin has two minutes to remember these three photographs...

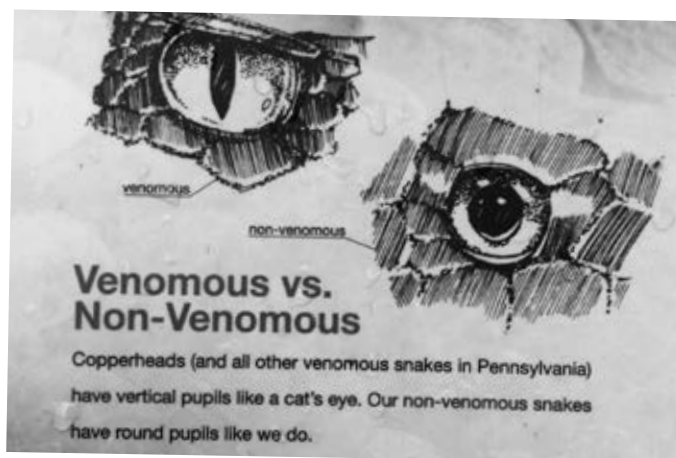
**EB**

(To CB) And you're not allowed to say anything.

*CB hands the images over to EB and sets the timer for two minutes. EB sits at the document camera, where she can control the display of each image, deciding for herself how much of the two minutes she wants to speak about each photo, while CB acts as timekeeper, sitting in another part of the room, watching.*

**CB**

Are you ready? Two minutes... Go!



**EB**

Ohhhhhh, oh, oh, oh, okay! So, this sign, I think it's hilarious because it's a sign that tells you which kinds of snakes are venomous and which are not, and if you'll notice, the venomous kind, the dangerous kind, it looks mean. And the one that's not dangerous, it's really cute and friendly-eyed... and so, I just thought this was very amusing, but this sign, I took this picture of this sign, in the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon. And, uh, Christine and I crossed the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon, uh... It was the most adventurous day

of our journey because we went, uh, we crossed a river and it was about, sort of, this deep, and we had our pack on, and, uh, we had one walking pole each because we only invested in one pair...and, uh, I let Christine go first, and she fell in—

**CB**

One minute!

**EB**

—and then, uh, I was like: okay, I see where the danger spot is, I'm just gonna mosey along... And I didn't fall in, so...that was satisfying for me. But, uh...one side of the... Oh dear, okay, we'll come back to it if we have time.



**EB**

So, this is...I don't care about this picture so I'm just going to rush over it. It's the light. It's just the light. I'm allergic to dogs so I can't really hang out with them, so it was not about the dog at all, it was about the light.