

**GONE**

Joanne Lam

The radio announcer said calmly, "Duke's Cycle is gone." -- Time stopped.

Duke's, a century old icon to the cycling community, melted in the flames. Gone are the old, and the new. The eclectic mix of kitsch and class. The fire took five buildings. Heritage buildings that contained the heart of the neighborhood. Water turned into ice on the electrical cables. At minus 20 degrees, the battle of the elements lasted into the night. Breaking news updates appear on every channel.

A fence goes up around the building carcasses, a surreal war zone in the middle of the bustling neighborhood. Passers-by stop. They take pictures. They talk about what was. Only streetcars are allowed to pass. They go extra slowly, ringing their bells, giving you extra time to take a good look. To think.

Fence comes down. Demolition crews cleared it all. Only the hoarding remains. It happened so fast. I am shocked by the light. It is suddenly too bright on that stretch of street. The hole in the block has become the newest tourist attraction.

The internet is flooded. Words of support pour from all corners of the country. Conspiracy theories abound. Many blame big corporations, valid or not. In the absence of a physical place, the community moves online.

We immediately speculate on what will happen. As architects, we watch every piece of empty land like hungry hawks. In our vast country, certain pieces of land are more precious than others. What will be built there? Condos? Walmart? We joke with a heavy heart, wary of every development. ➔

