

# In Photos: The empty public places of my hometown

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By Jadine Ngan

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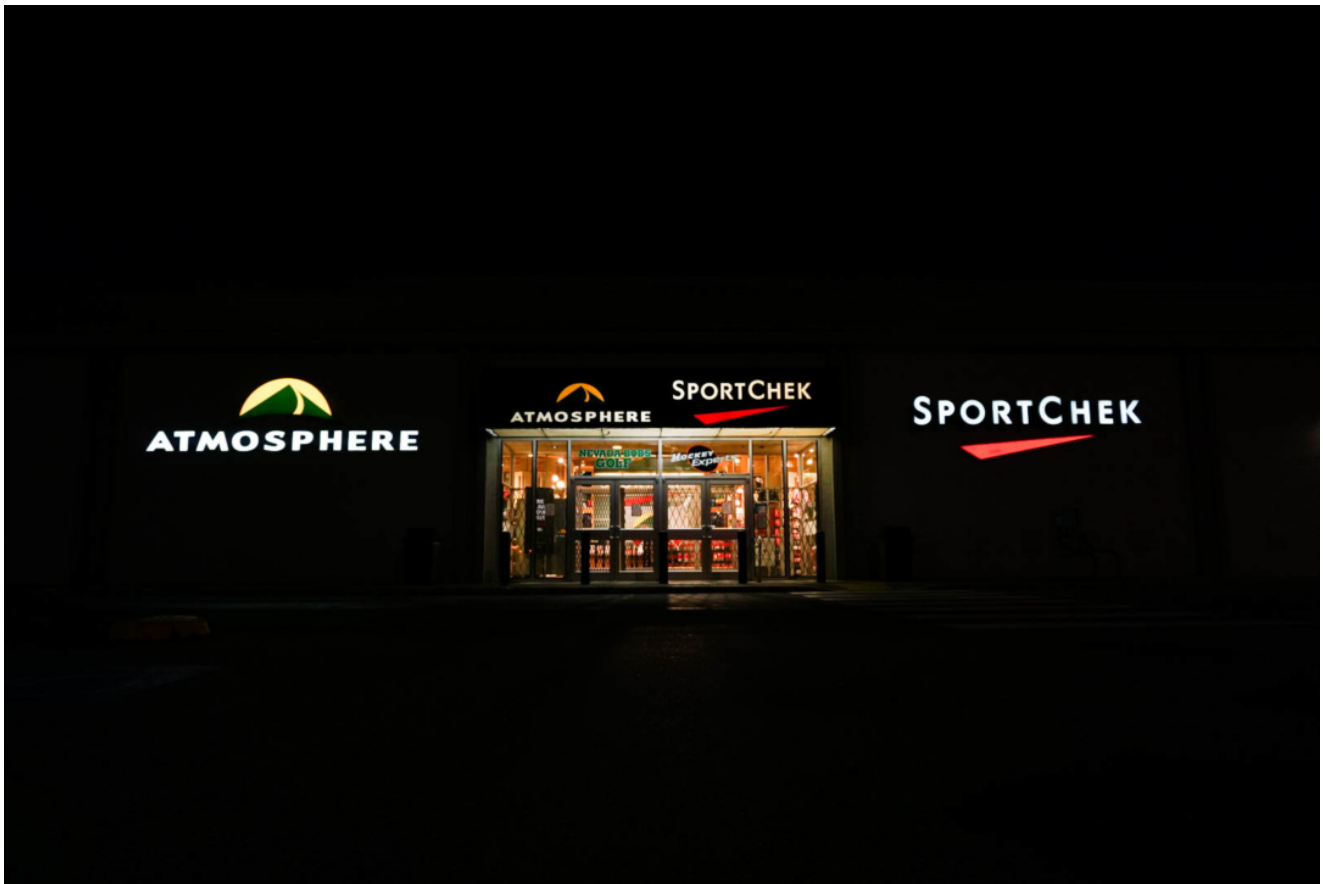
I've lived in Richmond, BC all my life, excluding the two school years I spent at U of T.

With the exception of the fringes of the city — the farmlands, vast blueberry fields and miles of ditches — I could map out the important parts of this place with just a pencil and paper. Here, the Sportchek where my dad used to drop me off to see my friends at the mall; there, Great One Supermarket, where I used to follow my mom around with a shopping cart, waiting in the snack aisle while she went to the seafood counter.

When I returned home after the winter semester, I arrived just as a near-complete lockdown rolled across the city — it went quiet. Suddenly, all these places I grew up frequenting seemed eerie and strange. I went for walks in the early evenings, when businesses and malls should have still been busy and took these photos of my hometown, emptied out.

Those first quiet weeks are past us now, but the isolation of physical distancing is not — nor is the threat of the city shutting down again. This morning, a radio commentator mused that another lockdown might be possible if BC doesn't flatten its rising second wave of cases. This wave, after all, is worse than the first, and second lockdowns aren't unheard of.

To me, these photos are a reminder of where we were several months ago and where we could be again. They also evoke the loneliness I and others I know have been feeling all summer — what's a familiar place without its familiar faces?



The Sportchek entrance of Richmond Centre, the mall that my friends and I used to default to when we'd choose a meeting place. I haven't seen some of those friends in over a year. JADINE NGAN/THE VARSITY



At 7:00 pm on a weekday, when this photo was taken, this Hudson's Bay parking lot is usually still busy.  
JADINE NGAN/THE VARSITY



This Tim Horton's, close to a major Skytrain stop, is usually packed. The day this photo was taken, it was open for take-out but not busy at all. JADINE NGAN/THE VARSITY



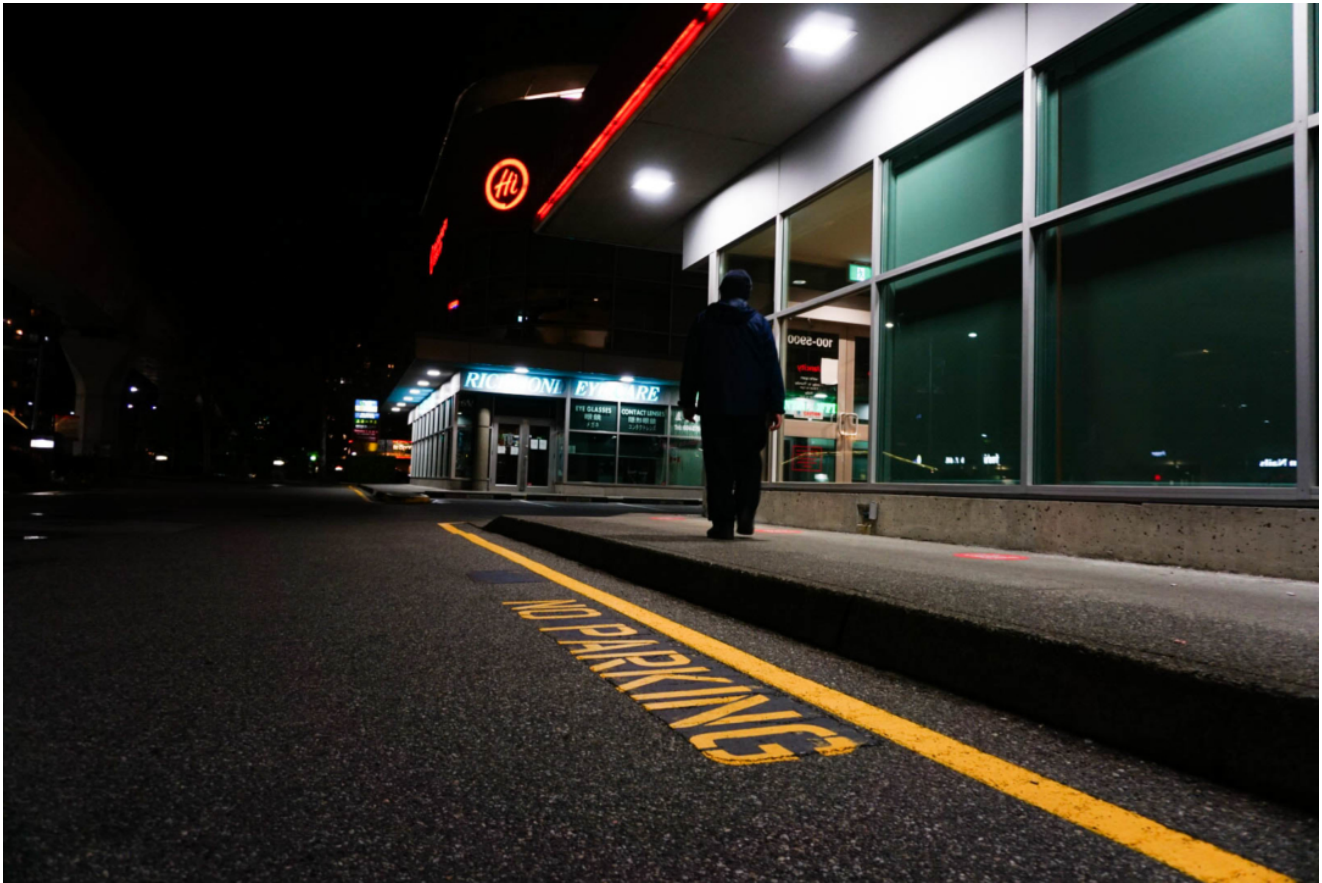
Parking lots all over the city were empty, indicating that very few people were frequenting public spaces and offices. JADINE NGAN/THE VARSITY



This supermarket, now boarded up, used to be where my parents took me shopping for Asian groceries.  
JADINE NGAN/THE VARSITY



Many businesses have closed as a result of the pandemic's economic fallout. This convenience store has stood on the corner of No. 3 Road and Westminster Highway for as long as I can remember. JADINE NGAN/THE VARSITY



With the threat of the virus being higher on crowded trails in the daytime, night walks in the quiet urban centre felt like the safest way to get exercise and fresh air. They will be a lot less practical in the fall and winter. JADINE NGAN/THE VARSITY



Translink buses, which I usually use to get around the city, initially mandated rear-door boarding to promote physical distancing but are soon going to require masks. I haven't been on a bus in months because I've barely been anywhere in months — with classes going online in the fall, that's unlikely to change anytime soon. JADINE NGAN/THE VARSITY