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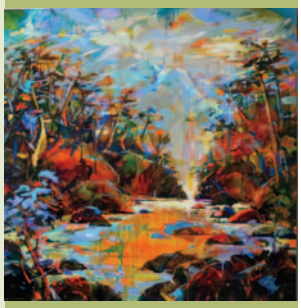
"Whispering Wind," by Eunmi Conacher, 36 x 36 inches, acrylic on canvas. See story on page 36.



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Strong sanctions needed for destroying public records

LESLIE CAMPBELL

The "duty to document" may sound like boring bureaucratese, but it's crucial to a functioning democracy.

Sometimes a media story takes so long to unfold that readers might well wonder why it's still being told. I imagine that's the case with the story of former Chief of Police Frank Elsner's fall from grace. Court battles kept most players—including the Office of Police Complaint Commissioner (OPCC)—quiet for years.

But policy-wise, we can lay a lot of the blame for dragging out such stories to highly imperfect access-to-information laws. Information that government relies on to make critical decisions is often just not available to journalists or citizens. Unless the public, often via journalists, has access to all the records behind such decisions, it's impossible to shine a light on how and where costly mistakes were made, or poor judgement was exercised, and thereby hold public officials accountable—essential ingredients for a healthy democracy.

The Elsner case implicates both the City of Victoria and Mayor Helps, as well as the provincial government, for denying the public's right to know. That denial was made possible, in particular, through a lack of legislation around what's called "duty to document."

In October 2018, *Focus'* David Broadland filed an FOI request with the City (shortly after the OPCC issued its investigation report) for communications between Mayor Helps and Mayor Desjardins during their three-month internal investigation into Elsner. The City transferred that request to the Victoria and Esquimalt Police Board. In the Board's response, there were virtually no communications between Helps and Desjardins about the drama unfolding around them during September, October and November 2015. When Broadland asked about this, he was told Mayor Help's emails had been deleted due to "email retention schedules." But when he asked to see those schedules, the Police Board admitted there were none. Moreover, the Police Board did not have custody and control of Mayor Helps' emails. The City of Victoria did.

In January, Broadland submitted a formal complaint to BC's Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner (OIPC) that the City of Victoria had failed to provide complete records. As he pointed out in his January/February *Focus* report, the City of Victoria has a policy requiring that both electronic and paper records created to "document the operations of the mayor" must be "retained for 10 years overall, and then transferred to Archives for selective retention." The email record in question was only three years in the past.

Finally, in July, we received a response from OIPC Senior Investigator Trevor Presley. He wrote, "Subsequent to your complaint, Rob Gordon [the City's Information Access and Privacy Analyst] did a second search with a relatively new eDiscovery tool, which did a much more thorough and comprehensive search, including searching for deleted emails. After doing this, he found an additional 271 emails plus 152 pages of attachments which he believed were responsive."

Those emails were released to *Focus* and, though highly redacted, they did allow some details to be filled in, including around both mayors' knowledge of sexual harassment and bullying charges against the Chief in the fall of 2015. This is all covered in Broadland's July/August feature report.

Broadland then asked OIPC for an inquiry because he questions some of the redactions. The inquiry has been granted, so stay tuned.

But right now I want to draw your attention to the way Investigator Presley summed things up: "The main problem here seems to be the deleted emails. I would note there is nothing in *FIPPA* [*Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*] which would require either the City of Victoria or the VEPB [Victoria and Esquimalt Police Board] to retain these emails, nor can the OIPC enforce record retention schedules set by public bodies."

Therein lies a big problem for a functioning democracy.

The BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association (FIPA) and other like-minded groups have been advocating for years that *FIPPA* legislation must include the duty to document, which "would compel government to document their decision making process so that citizens can exercise their information rights."

As the non-profit organization notes on its website: "The original lawmakers who drafted the *FIPPA* did not anticipate that government would hold meetings in person and over the phone without writing anything down (a phenomenon known as 'oral government'), use personal email addresses to conduct government business, and maliciously delete records in order to circumnavigate freedom of information laws (a practice known as 'triple-delete'). But unfortunately that is now the reality in which we are living."

The NDP promised two years ago to amend the almost-30-year-old *FIPPA* to include a duty to document. When the Liberal government was caught in 2015 purposely "triple deleting" communications about the Highway of Tears, the NDP had a lot to say. And well they should. It involved willful destruction of publicly owned, government records—records essential for transparency and accountability. (In the end, one government employee got fined $2,500—not for destroying the records, as there are no rules or penalties for that, but for lying about it under oath during Information and Privacy Commissioner Elizabeth Denham's investigation.)

Current and former Information and Privacy Commissioners have urged the provincial government to amend *FIPPA* to include a duty to document. Denham's cogent and strongly worded *Access Denied* report describes it as necessary to restore public confidence and make clear that the government does not endorse an "oral culture" devised to avoid accountability.

BC's current Attorney General David Eby, as part of an all-party special legislative committee on the subject in 2016, made a specific recommendation to include a duty to document within *FIPPA*. Among the many risks of poor record retention cited in that all-party report was this one from David Loukidelis, QC (a former Information and Privacy Commissioner): "Loss of public confidence in government over time due to the perception that the absence of documentation reflects a deliberate tactic to hide, among other things, wrongdoing (including corruption or favouritism)."

During the 2017 election campaign, the NDP unequivocally committed to updating *FIPPA* and including a duty to document. Unfortunately, since they've been in power, nothing has been done. In fact, they muddied the waters last spring when they passed changes to another act, the *Information Management Act*, bragging about them as a Canadian first. Vincent Gogolek, FIPA's executive director,

called the changes "a pathetic excuse for a response to massive pressure for action on this issue. A legal duty uses the words 'must' or 'shall,' not the word 'may.'" BC's current Information and Privacy Commissioner Michael McEvoy condemned the NDP's legislation as ineffective and cynical: "As it now stands, the *Information Management Act* designates the Minister herself as primarily responsible for ensuring her Ministry's compliance with the duty to document decisions. Citizens would find it very surprising that, on its face, the current law makes a Minister responsible for investigating her own conduct."

And it gets worse: guess who, within a couple of months of the bill passing, was found to be using her personal email address to conduct government business in order to circumvent Freedom of Information laws—laws which she oversees? Minister of Citizens' Services Jinny Sims—who had a year earlier already been caught doing the same thing. Seriously.

Perhaps the capper is that the *Information Management Act* applies to only 41 public bodies, not the 2,900 that come under *FIPPA* legislation, where duty to document really needs to be enshrined—as mandatory (the City's non-mandatory records retention policy illustrating why). And it has to have significant penalties to be meaningful. Finally, implementation and enforcement of proper documentation must come under the jurisdiction of the independent Information and Privacy Commissioner.

Unfortunately, it seems once a party is in power, at any level of government, the public's right to know how decisions have been made sinks way down the priority list.

Looking at the federal situation, a duty to document was never part of Bill C-58, the long-overdue federal attempt to update information access legislation dating back to 1983. In 2016, federal, provincial and territorial commissioners issued a joint resolution calling for—the third time, they noted—a legislated duty to document accompanied by effective oversight and enforcement provisions. Passed in June 2019, the new federal regulations were largely panned by those on the side of transparency for, among other things, excluding prime ministers' and cabinet ministers' records from access coverage, and for not including a duty to document.

In my research, I was surprised to come across an example used by the federal Information Commissioner to illustrate the importance of duty to document. It related to Transport Canada's behaviour in relation to the Victoria harbour airport, the focus of my feature report last month. The investigation of Transport Canada, the commissioner's report stated, "revealed that the institution had taken no notes or minutes at some of the regular meetings officials had held with the City of Victoria, especially meetings related to the expansion of the harbour in 2010." At the commissioner's urging, Transport Canada eventually came up with 10 pages.

I could give more examples of how journalists and citizens alike have been frustrated—perhaps disgusted is a more apt description—at the seeming disregard of public officials, all paid by taxpayers, to maintain proper records of how they arrived at their decisions. Given the paucity of records, it sometimes seems decisions are made in a cavalier fashion. A recent Victoria example of this, shown through a citizen's FOI, was the removal of the Innovation Tree at Humboldt and Government Streets. And there's always the worry that some sort of corruption or influence from improper quarters is being applied. How can we know—unless it's all fully documented and accessible under the law?

Did you know September 28 is Right to Know Day? Editor Leslie Campbell recommends the BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association's website fipa.bc.ca. Empower yourself through one of their free FOI workshops.

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An airport in our midst

Leslie Campbell's article on Victoria's harbour airport in the July/August edition was very informative. I live overlooking Victoria's middle and outer harbours, and have clear views of both Middle Harbour's Alpha Runway (East-West) and Outer Harbour's Bravo Runway (NE-SW).

Campbell's article quotes Transport Canada's Simon Rivet on the subject of "noise mitigation strategies" implemented by Transport Canada for Victoria Harbour air traffic: "We only allow three-bladed turbo-prop aircraft, which is the quietest version of a floatplane in existence."

It is true that turbo-prop aircraft make up most of the traffic in Victoria Inner Harbour Airport, but there are also a number of smaller piston-engined aircraft that take off. Hence, I challenge Rivet's statement "we only allow…" One's attention is certainly attracted to the piston-engined aircraft; one's hearing suffers when these noisy beasts take off. It is time to enforce the ban on aircraft that do not meet the three-bladed turbo-prop rule.

Rivet is also quoted as saying: "Best practices include the reduction of reverse thrust when landing, with sufficient room to allow for a natural slowdown, rather than have to put it in 'reverse', which is quite noisy." According to Rivet, "The preferred runway for landings is eastbound on Alpha Runway"—that's the runway right through where people live. But an important percentage of landings are westbound on Alpha Runway, taking advantage of the wind from the south. This means that aircraft are now heading west, away from town. There is then every incentive for pilots to stop as quickly as possible on landing, because they're going the wrong way—away from their destination. I would estimate that eight out of ten landings from the east involve pilots reversing engines to stop as quickly as they can, creating completely unnecessary, high-decibel noise, to the annoyance of all who live on both sides of Middle Harbour.

Pilots and airlines are their own worst enemy. If they keep on behaving this way, they're going to get themselves kicked out of the harbour because of the noise they create. The use of reverse thrust should be prohibited except in the case of an emergency.

Leslie Campbell interviewed a few of the thousands of people who live and work on both sides of Middle Harbour. Many are concerned about the safety of mingling aircraft with boats, canoes, the Coho and other harbour users. We are told that aircraft fly within 50 metres of buildings on the Songhees side. This means that airplanes are passing within only a few metres of the boats tied up in the Victoria International Marina at the foot of Cooperage Place in Middle Harbour. The alarm clock for the occupants of those boats will be the 7am flight out of Victoria—the first in the day.

In my mind's eye, the thousands of inhabitants on both sides of Middle Harbour will one day rise up and shout, "I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this anymore!" (from the movie *Network*). They will take to small boats and fill the harbour, preventing all aircraft movement.

The problem is, where are they going to go, these airplanes, if they get chased away? To solve the problem of the safety and noise in Middle Harbour, Alpha Runway should be closed. The aircraft will simply have to use Bravo Runway.

Donald Shields

That was a most informative and thorough article on our centre-of-town water airport. A fine piece of reportage. No matter how much the lady harbour master says that everything is hunky dory, I agree with the chap who says it's a disaster looking for just the right conditions to explode.

Ross Smith

My congratulations and sincere appreciation to Leslie Campbell for an exceedingly well-written article, which presents for public viewing many of the safety and health concerns related to the design and operation of Victoria Harbour Water Airport. In 2017, Transport Canada (TC) advised that, by the end of that year, there would be an amendment "to raise the current certified water aerodromes safety level to one comparable to that found at certified land airports." This was yet another in almost 20 years' worth of unfulfilled promises, but this was the first time that TC actually admitted to applying a lesser level of safety when certifying water aerodromes, which, to me, was and is reprehensible, especially when the water airport is located in the heart of a city with planes approaching at greater than 100 mph within 50 metres or less from a popular walkway and multi-storey residences, a distance that could be closed in less than a second! I've seen and reported to TC on too many close-call incidents to think anything other than it's a case of "when" not "if" a crash will occur here.

I firmly believe that TC's recently released notice of proposed amendments "to establish regulatory requirements for the operation and certification of water airports in Canada" is no coincidence. TC media relations staff were approached by *Focus* months ago, so TC was well aware that the article would soon be made public. TC has had more than 19 years to prepare the text of such an amendment and, I believe, had it ready just in case. I think "just in case" arrived in the form of the *Focus* article, which now has made TC take the first step to right the wrong I believe they've perpetrated here since 2000 when TC certified Victoria Harbour Water Airport. Thank you Leslie Campbell and *Focus* for this achievement! I urge all those who have similar concerns about our water airport to respond to Transport Canada CARAC's invitation [despite the September 2 deadline].

Susan M. Woods

Did the mayors obstruct the Elsner investigation?

Thank you for keeping this dreadful waste of money and deceitful behaviour in the public awareness. Our current police force could have had the benefit of the funds instead of keeping an arrogant lout on the payroll.

Betty Young

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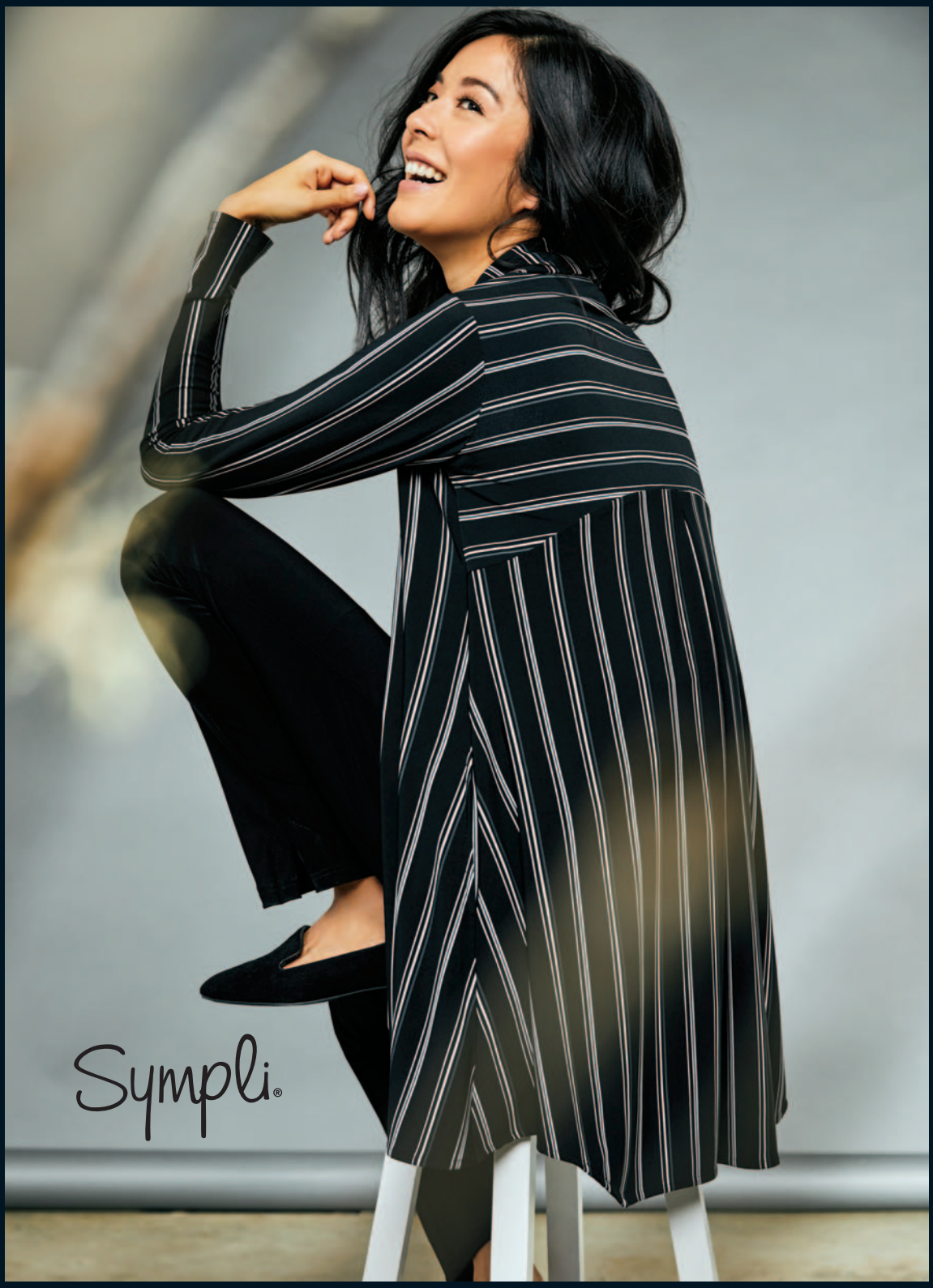

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More entertainment, less art

Thank you, Ross Crockford, for such an insightful, enlightened piece. I am sharing it far and wide in hopes it reaches the general population of the CRD. It is time to tell it like it is when it comes to the underhanded tactics of the Royal and McPherson Theatres Society.

Jennifer MacLeod

Great article; a really great summary of the situation as it has unfolded. I have one question though: where do you get the figure of $580,000 for the municipal support of the theatre? According to the Royal McPherson Theatres Society's own online annual reports, the amount the three municipalities (Victoria, Oak Bay, Saanich) contribute to the Royal is only $100,000, and Victoria alone contributes $350,000 annually to the McPherson Playhouse. Is there another $480,000 coming in some form that doesn't appear on their financial statements?

Full disclosure: I am a 29-year veteran musician of the Victoria Symphony and president of a national organization of symphonic musicians, and I have seen this scenario play out in similar fashion across the country. We all pay lip service to how much our communities value resident arts companies, but we provide terrible infrastructure for them to serve the community from. This whole situation feels like a "renoviction" except that we have only one choice of where to move to next, and the opera and dance companies have no choice.

Robert Fraser

Ross Crockford responds: Thank you for the kind comments. I'm not an accountant, so I can't speak to how the RMTS breaks down its financial statements, but it did state in its presentations to the three owner municipalities that it receives $580,000 annually from them, via the CRD—$480,000 for capital expenses, and $100,000 for its operating budget. A part of the problem may be that this amount of funding has not increased since 1998, when it was established by a bylaw. The RMTS is proud that it has not asked for an increase in this funding. Maybe it needs to be increased anyway—and more municipalities need to pay for the services the theatres provide.

Not your grandpa's wildfires

Urban wildfires are certainly a horrifying possibility. I appreciate the information Stephen Hume shares with us about it. However, his article may have left an impression that we might be better off reducing urban trees due to the possibility of wildfires.

I asked two forest ecologists and a professor of urban forestry whether urban trees dry out vegetation, as the article suggests. All replied that the issue was complex and does not lend itself to generalization. UBC urban forest professor Cecil Konendijik wrote: "It's very bold to state that trees dry out the ground. In many places forests are the natural ecosystem, and actually help maintain the proper water cycles. The question is more to imitate nature where possible, and develop close-to-nature forest systems rather than planting a lot of non-native tree species that require more water and are less drought tolerant."

He adds: "I am not a forest fire expert, but the solution is definitely not to just remove trees. There are many ways to deal with forest fire risks, including ecological processes, working with the reality of fire as part of ecosystems, as well as e.g. the FireSmart program to minimize fire risks. In urban forestry, we always have to deal with risks (e.g. fire, falling trees), but these have to be considered in the wider context of the many essential benefits forests and trees provide."

California's Sierra Club says a home itself is often "more ignitable than the vegetation surrounding it." A common sight after wildfires in urban areas can be smoking holes in the ground, where houses once stood—still surrounded by living, green trees!

Well-spaced plant life can actually block wind-blown embers from reaching one's home. On the other hand, a yard completely devoid of vegetation can create a "bowling alley" for embers. Burning embers can float in on the wind from as far as a mile away.

If people are considering cutting down urban trees, please first read the Sierra Club's "5 Ways to Protect Your Home from Wildfires." It suggests fire-proofing from the house out, including replacing or treating flammable shingles, keeping gutters cleared of dry leaves and needles, considering external sprinklers, not piling firewood beside or near the house, and making sure embers won't find an easy entry point.

Let's make well-thought-out decisions about trees. Mature trees are not easily replaced. They take decades to grow. And most importantly, they may well be the key to reducing climate change.

A recent study found that planting trees, and preventing further deforestation, are by far the best climate mitigation tools we have.

A lead researcher said, "I thought restoration would be in the top 10, but it is overwhelmingly more powerful than all of the other climate change solutions proposed."

Last year, the UN's International Panel on Climate Change warned that we have only 10 to 12 years (now 9 to 11) to make drastic changes, in order to prevent catastrophe.

Wildfires are a possibility, and we should do all we can to protect ourselves. But the climate crisis is here now.

It is more important than ever before to preserve and protect every tree we can, and to plant many more.

Grace Golightly

Stephen Hume responds: It is true that any one home itself may be more ignitable than the vegetation surrounding it, particularly if it has wooden sidings, decks and a cedar shake roof. Or it may not. However, this depends upon the house, the type of vegetation and the proximity of that vegetation to the structure. Municipal and provincial fire authorities are quite clear that among the most significant urban wildfire hazards are non-fire resistant vegetation adjacent to, touching or overhanging

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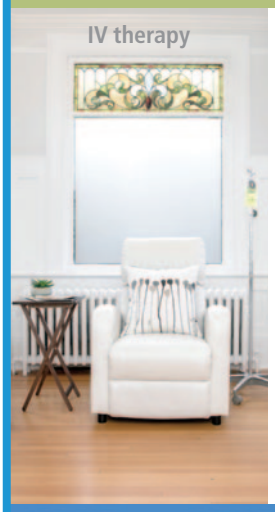

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structures. This becomes more significant during prolonged drought and hot spells. Leaf and needle debris on roofs, in gutters and so on pose major hazards in urban-wildland interface fires.

Let us indeed make well-thought decisions about trees, their type, placement and management. That's why the article calls for a "vigorous, mature, adult conversation at the community level about the danger zone at the fringes of Greater Victoria."

I have the greatest respect for the Sierra Club but, as a former volunteer firefighter, I believe fire safety information is best obtained from fire safety experts. Two excellent sources are the Saanich Fire Department (summer-fire-safety.html) which deals with extensive urban-wildland interface zones and the provincial government's fire safety website: (firesmart)

The letter suggests that I imply "that urban trees are nice and all, but that we might be better off without them due to the possibility of wildfires." What I said was that while the urban forest is beneficial, not all trees are the same and drought-intolerant trees that are not fire resistant can pose a risk that deserves discussion. I said: "Does that mean we should mow down the urban forest? Of course not."

Regarding the impact of certain kinds and species of trees on groundwater in drought conditions: A study published in *Hydrology and Earth System Sciences* found that fast growing exotic tree plantations, in this case eucalyptus, had water budgets over a three-year period which exceeded rainfall replenishment of subsurface moisture by 62 percent. "These results have obvious implications for the long term sustainability of growth rates from these plantations and the recharge of groundwater." One of the implications is that deep-rooted non-native trees which use more water than is replenished by rainfall may pose a threat to more shallow-rooted—and fire resistant—native species like Douglas fir.

Local gardeners and horticulturists may find a 2012 article in National Geographic, "Plants That Will Suck Your Yard Dry," of interest.

Finally, climate-driven urban-wildland interface fires are not a possibility, they are a fact. They occur with increasing frequency and intensity on every continent and while, as with weather, there is variability from year to year, the trend has been relentlessly upward along with global temperature.

Adapting to wildfire threat is not a zero sum equation. It doesn't mean removing urban forest and all its benefits. It does mean thoughtful strategic planning regarding appropriate tree species and types for available water budgets, placement in built environments, and management within the highest risk zones where thinning, pruning and judicious removal of ground fuel can reduce fire risk substantially. How and where to do this seems a reasonable subject for public discussion.

Rare but serious side effects of "Cipro"

Thanks so much to Alan Cassels for a very valuable article. However, given that officialdom has even admitted that as low as one percent of adverse drug and vaccine events ever gets reported, I doubt that casualties from these fluoroquinolone antibiotics are rare at all. Just within my own circle of contacts, I know of several people who've seen their health devastated by Cipro, Levaquin etc.

Some years back, when I had severe ear infections in both ears, I was given a prescription for Cipro with a loud warning from the specialist that if I didn't take it, I would end up with "cauliflower ears." Having successfully avoided antibiotics for decades and knowing how serious Cipro's side effects could be, I opted for an internal homeopathic remedy and herbal ear drops which cleared things up in days. When the ENT—who was totally ignorant of Cipro's dangers—saw me, she was shocked and meekly said, "Well, whatever you did, it sure worked."

Roxanne (name withheld)

Fun and loafing in the BC public service

I was amused by Russ Francis' article in the July/August 2019 *Focus*. It reminded me of advice I received during a middle management course many moons ago in the federal public service. The instructor informed his astonished class that it was possible to get by in the public service by putting in only a 35 percent effort—and that anything less might draw attention to the employee!

More important in Francis' article, is the damage he notes being done to the historical record in the public service by the advent of electronic means of written communication. Most business is now done by e-mail and most e-mails never end up in a record management system. While bad for maintaining a corporate memory, it will also be impossible for historians in the future to analyze and write about how public policy has developed in these decades. That will be the real shame.

David B Collins

Cruise ship emissions need City's attention

If Victoria City Council is so concerned about the environment, why don't they make it mandatory for all cruise ships to hook-up to shore power when parked at Ogden Point? Compared to modern cars, cruise ships are environmental dinosaurs and spewing their exhaust in a residential neighborhood is unacceptable. If Victoria wants to keep expanding the number of cruise ship visits then authorities should install adequate shore power facilities and require all cruise ships to use them.

Steen Petersen

Open letter to Victoria City Council

This is an urgent request to have the Victoria City Council approve the expropriation of the lot at 1980 Fairfield Place, which lies adjacent to Gonzales Hill Regional Park and resides within a degrading mature Garry oak ecosystem at the top of Gonzales Hill. As you would presumably know, the City has the right under the *BC Land Expropriation Act* (RSBC 1996 and current to August 7, 2019) to carry out this action, even without the approval of the lot owner. I would submit, in light of its declaration recently of a Climate Emergency, my tabling of numerous scientific studies and reports, and neighbourhood presentations (particularly focussing on ecosystem resiliency, water runoff and blasting legal co-liabilities to us and another immediate property owner, and dealing with the Climate Emergency), the City has a duty to approve such an action. To date, when this topic has been brought up, emails to individual councillors have been mostly ignored (which is disrespectful, discourteous, and unprofessional). Regardless, no tangible and precise reasons have been given by council regarding the reluctance to expropriate in this exceptional instance (especially dealing with a highly unique and rare greenfield site), other than the timid excuse that the situation doesn't warrant such an action.

Repeated requests have been made to the City for evidence that formal offers were made to the owners to purchase their lot. Councillor Isitt claims three offers were made and Mayor Helps claims five or six offers were made, while the owners claim no offers were forthcoming. To date, in spite of related requests, no evidence of any such offers to purchase has been provided.

To date, and on a broader related note, there seems to be focused political will and concerted actions to continue to support developers who ransack our region's natural assets. "Densification" continues to serve as a convenient excuse and talking point for the lack of fortitude of any of our local politicians, including this council, to deal with discouraging, not overtly encouraging, at every turn, continued significant increases in population growth.

The benefits of densification are entirely offset by continued population increases in

addition to the need for additional municipal infrastructure and higher possible fire risks with the proliferation of downtown high-rises. Council encouraging and endorsing continued regional population growth is the antithesis of dealing with a Climate Emergency (as is encouraging a cruise ship industry, and as was approving an Inner Harbour luxury lot marina). Anyone who understands ecology and the concept of ecological carrying-capacity would appreciate this science-constrained fact. Our regional ecosystems, including our watershed, can only stand so much adverse impact before the resiliency of the region's ecosystems are undermined. Council needs to "walk the talk" on dealing with the council's declaration of a Climate Emergency.

Our neighbourhood has shared dozens of studies and presented the latest scientific evidence for the need to preserve the ecosystems within an urban setting and the urgent need to deal with Climate Catastrophe. Yet the City continues to encourage and allow the literal scouring of soil and vegetation on individual lots, replacing it with a lesser number of immature tree species and mostly sterile topsoil. Some egregious examples of tree, vegetation, and soil lot scouring include: Abstract's "Belvedere Park" development at 1201 Fort Street and the complete removal of a mature urban forest, except for two large trees, with the City's full blessing; the scouring of the two lots connected to the Rhodo project along Fairfield Road. Another lot scouring is the apparent entitlement of the owners of 1980 Fairfield Place to build an additional structure (i.e., a 600 square foot garden suite).

In light of a bona fide Climate Emergency, there comes a time when a politician has to come down on the side of ecosystem legal rights and the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Unfortunately, in this case, it is to the detriment of individual rights. There are, however, two good options: (1) the purchase of the lot by the CRD and/or the City of Victoria (to make up for the initial, ill-considered mistake of creating this polygonal lot in 1955 and then not putting it on its Land Acquisition List over a 64-year period) or (2) expropriation.

Victoria Council needs to act urgently. Show you actually have the foresight, wisdom, and strength to expropriate this lot. Please act like you actually believe there is a Climate Emergency!

Brad Atchison

LETTERS
Send to focusedit@shaw.ca

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Behind the emergency ward curtain

MONIKA ULLMANN

A plea for a better, more compassionate health care system.

January 21, 2am, in an overflow cubicle of the Emergency Ward, Royal Jubilee Hospital. Trapped on my gurney behind the curtain for three days and nights, I was sliding into despair. It was hard to fathom how I flipped from a healthy senior recuperating well from hip replacement surgery to a frail, very ill woman suffering from some intestinal bug that was never diagnosed. They thought I had pneumonia and possibly a blood clot as well. But the respirologist disagreed; he thought I had food particles lodged in my lungs due to throwing up and fainting at the same time, right in front of the admissions desk. I highly recommend this as way of getting instant admittance.

Once inside, nobody had time to think much about a diagnosis; it was enough that I had an infection. They proceeded to pump me full of powerful antibiotics. And nobody could get near me without wearing the full hazmat outfit: a big plastic garment, gloves, and masks. A warning sign was pinned to my curtain. I was clearly a danger to the general public though I wasn't even coughing. They continued to ignore my intestinal bug, which kept me from eating. I was getting weaker every day.

Worse, I wasn't getting any information on my condition; everybody was much too harried to stop and chat. Even if they had been able to agree on what exactly was wrong with me.

I was lucky they did not "forget" me in a hallway for five days, which happened to a veteran my age at Victoria General during the same week. I was only left for an hour, while still throwing up and waiting for a special X-Ray device that blows up like a balloon while they move you into position. The orderly, who was in charge of pushing my gurney through the hallways, kept muttering, "not well done, not well done," before leaving me to my fate.

All this is churning through my exhausted mind while I pray to the god I don't really believe in to please, do something. Get me out of here. Let me sleep. Let someone figure out what I actually have. Let me talk to a friendly doctor, please.

But this cannot be done. There are GPs on staff, but you have to really put on the pressure to get him/her to your gurney. They are super busy, just like everyone else here. Who is in charge? Well, that is a good question. Apparently, the system is in charge. But a system is not a human being, and it is very poor at communicating or empathizing.

Those skills are frills; just getting the workload done is the priority. Since the introduction of a digitized health care system, everyone finds themselves serving this system instead of their patients. In addition, everyone lives in their own silo. Nobody is responsible for the patient; instead, they are responsible for a body part that corresponds to their speciality. It's the factory system of medicine, and everyone knows it is deeply flawed. We don't have to do it this way, but change is hard. And even more important, there is a lack of vision. What is the future of this well-intentioned enterprise going to look like? And why are we so terrified of making any fundamental changes?

I had ample time to ponder such questions during the previous year when I battled to see a surgeon who would consent to give me a new hip, and that is an improvement over the two years it used to take. I had no GP during this time, and I still don't. GP's are becoming *rara avis*, leaving the profession in droves. Thousands of seniors in this province cannot find one. They are stressed, as are the doctors. One of my doctors at a walk-in clinic literally had a fit and threatened to quit on the spot while I was just trying to get a referral to a surgeon. My bone specialist was sad because his American-trained son could not practice in BC "because the numbers don't add up."

This situation is entirely the fault of the provincial government that doesn't pay general practitioners what they are worth. If you're not a specialist in BC, you're barely making a living. In addition, foreign-trained doctors find that they are not wanted here; that they basically have to redo their entire training. We can protect our standards and still admit doctors from other countries; however, the political will is sorely lacking. Instead, we train doctors for other countries, such as Saudi Arabia. Not well done.

It's not surprising then that Canada's health care system is ranked at a dismal #30 by the World Health Organization. It isn't even as good as the UK's, which comes in at #18, or Malta (!), ranked at #5. Germany is ranked at #25, Switzerland is #20 and the number-one position is given to France. Why can't we learn something from them? The USA is #37, which should cure us, once and for all, of thinking they know how to do things better. I suspect that our aversion to making the changes that need to be made is linked to our underlying fear that we might, somehow, end up with the US system.

But wait. Wait. I am not saying that overhauling the system we have is going to solve all our problems. More often, the Law of Unintended Consequences kicks in and things are no better or even worse than before. See the Province of Ontario's plan to "integrate" everyone under a new, bigger umbrella system called Health Ontario. They claim it will make everyone more "efficient." That's a weasel word for cuts, as everyone knows. Being efficient is good, but not at the cost of actually treating patients like human beings.

We are overdue for a public conversation about where our beloved health care system is heading.

I believe that, no matter what kind of system we have, we might remind ourselves that patient care is more than a practical problem to be solved with drugs, tests and digital systems. There is another, largely forgotten dimension: let's call it healing. It includes prevention, mental health care, and has more to do with attitudes than efficiencies. It used to be the job of priests and shamans. Or relatives. But priests are not what everyone wants, and relatives are often living somewhere else. Psychologists are also becoming rare, just like GPs.

So it really is up to the hospital staff to minister to the emotional, or dare I say spiritual side of people in their care. We are not simply a collection of symptoms and body parts. We all have need of human connection, especially when we're ill and vulnerable. When you experience empathy and caring, you feel stronger and better, no matter how ill you might be.

I can only speak for myself, and I am sorry to say that during my three days of hell behind the curtain, I found exactly two people who, in spite of having too much to do and too little time to do it, chose empathy and kindness over expediency.

One was a middle-aged nurse named "Nishi" who stroked my tangled hair and

murmured, "there there, you've had a bad time, haven't you? Don't worry, I will look out for you." And the other was one of the GPs, who appeared after I pressured the nurses with questions about what was going on with me. I told him that I was about to have a breakdown and would escape into the parking lot in my bare feet because I couldn't face another sleepless night on the gurney. That I still had no clear idea of what I actually had. He apologized, explained my case in great detail and ordered Ativan to get me through the third night. He wasn't in charge of the transfers to the wards, and he wasn't pretending that three nights on a gurney was an acceptable situation. I will never forget the kindness these two professionals showed me. It was thanks to them that I didn't have a complete breakdown.

I think Tommy Douglas, the father of our health care, understood this. Like the great African-American intellectual, Cornel West, Douglas pushed hard for social justice in all aspects of Canadian life and might have made West's definition his own: "Social Justice is what LOVE looks like in public," wrote West. Douglas meant much the same thing, when he said: "We are all in this world together, and the only test of our character that matters is how we look after the least fortunate among us. How we look after each other, not how we look after ourselves. That's all that really matters, I think." We strive towards that ideal, but we're always in danger of forgetting it in favour of managerial Holy Cows like "efficiency" and acquiring ever-more-sophisticated machines at great cost.

The administrators of this stressed system should acknowledge that there are serious problems throughout. Instead of apologizing endlessly and insisting that leaving patients in hallways is an anomaly, let's talk about what needs to change. Publicly. And since change is hard and takes time, you could stress that while we sort out the practical problems, empathy, caring and love are priorities. Your stressed staff and the patients need to know that the BC health care system and the Royal Jubilee Hospital care for the whole human being, not just their body parts. They need to know that somebody up there is listening, and acting on their behalf. That we can and will do better. That the system can and will be fixed. That you care.

Monika Ullmann is the author of *The Life and Art of David Marshall* (2008) and *Rebel Muse, a Memoir of Life with Peter Paul Ochs* (2017).

Focus presents: Tom Watson, Odlum Brown Limited ADVERTISEMENT

Aligning your investments with your values

"My investment theory," says Investment Advisor Tom Watson, "is to purchase companies that increase their dividends on a regular basis. The stock price often follows."

As proof, Tom provides long-term performance reports for all of his clients which show the solid returns they have made over the years. He credits these returns to his firm's independent, research-based approach, his thirty years of experience and his Bachelor of Science degree in Economics and Psychology.

Generally, he maintains a buy, hold, and "tweak" philosophy, occasionally using options where suitable to enhance and protect returns. Tom insists that investment portfolios be created in alignment with his clients' values and tolerance for risk. He uses what he calls the "from the client out approach," tailoring his recommendations to each client's unique set of needs and investment objectives.

Working with Odlum Brown since 1994 has been a good fit, Tom notes, as the firm allows him independence and flexibility. Odlum Brown's research department is guided solely by their clients' interests and there are no underwriting pressures. "This independence," he says, "allows me to find the best investment solutions for my clients."

Raised in Victoria, Tom takes an active role in his community. For a number of years he chaired the Gorge View Society, which oversaw the completion and maintenance of affordable housing units for seniors who are on minimum income, at Chown Place. He is also the proud father of three adult sons, and coached youth soccer, volleyball, and basketball while volunteering at Doncaster Elementary, Reynolds High School and Lakehill Soccer Club.

An avid environmentalist, Tom serves on the Board of Directors of The Land Conservancy of BC (TLC). "I've had a life-long belief in working to support the community and the environment," says Tom. Working with the TLC fits that mission well, and with his financial background he has been able to assist the Conservancy to build a stronger financial footing.

On the personal front, his environmental ethics have led him to bike to work, driving his electric car only when needed. The house he and his wife recently built features solar panels. He proudly reports he's had no hydro bills since March (and the last one was only $28); "I live what I preach and I invest the same way—and find it actually works."

Tom Watson

Tom prefers to invest in growing companies where all of the stakeholders, from shareholders and employees to the larger community, are treated with respect and consideration. This preference has led him to recommend utilities involved in renewable energy like wind, solar and geothermal. These utilities would not only be buying green energy assets, but also increase their dividends regularly.

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Who, me?

DAVID BROADLAND

Canadians increasingly hate each other over politics. To reverse that trend we need to think beyond our natural tribe.

A survey of 1300 Americans conducted by Yale University earlier this year showed that the most polarizing issues in that country are global warming and environmental protection. Not abortion, not immigration, not health care.

The survey asked people to rank 29 issues in order of importance in deciding whom to vote for in the 2020 presidential election.

Conservative Republicans ranked environmental protection at 25th place and global warming dead last.

Liberal Democrats ranked environmental protection as the second most important issue and global warming as third.

No other issues had such dramatic differences in opinion as to whether they were even a priority to address.

Anthony Leiserowitz, director of the Yale program on climate change communication, and one of the principal investigators for the survey, noted, "Climate change is now more politically polarizing than any other issue in America."

Canadians are becoming increasingly politically polarized, too. Earlier this year, *MacLeans* published a story headlined, "One in four Canadians hate their political opponents."

The story was based on the results of a survey conducted by the polling company Abacus Data. According to *MacLeans* , Abacus "defined polarized Canadians as those who say they 'hate' either Liberals or Conservatives and who dislike compromise or think of people who don't vote like them as their enemies. Using those criteria, Abacus found that 26 percent of the population are deeply entrenched in their political views, while 74 percent are more open-minded."

Of the Canadians who said they "hate" their political opponents, 47 percent are supporters of the Conservative party, and the other slightly-more-than-half are distributed amongst Liberal, NDP, Green, and Bloc Québécois supporters.

Political polarization is damaging to a democracy. It's widely agreed that deep political division makes it harder to solve real problems. Take global warming, for example. Scientists, almost universally, tell us that global

warming is caused by carbon emissions from human activities. Those emissions eventually need to be eliminated altogether if we are to avoid passing tipping points—like the melting of Arctic permafrost, or the Amazon rainforest losing its ability to generate rain—where we would lose any chance of controlling global temperature rise. Scientists have been telling us that for many years. Reducing emissions is long past due, but global emissions were estimated to have risen 2.7 percent above 2017 levels during 2018.

In the latest year for which data on Canada's carbon emissions is available—2017—our national emissions rose by eight megatonnes. Not coincidentally, emissions from oil sands mining and processing also rose by eight megatonnes in 2017.

In Canada, as in the US, there's strong division between voters on the question of whether there's an urgent need to address our nation's role in global warming. One side claims our emissions are just a drop in the global bucket. If 1.6 percent is just a drop, they're right. The other side says, also correctly, that Canadians have the highest per capita emissions (about 22 tonnes per person) of any country on the planet, and so we have the highest per capita responsibility to reduce our emissions.

Differences in per capita emissions between Canadian provinces is another point of division. Alberta's per capita emissions are five times higher than British Columbia's. Any further development of the oil sands projects will increase that divide. With both the federal Liberal and Conservative parties supporting further expansion of the oil sands, that means deeper division between British Columbians and Albertans is inevitable. According to Abacus Data we already "hate" each other, to some extent.

Unless we change how we talk about this issue, national enmity is going to grow, and we won't be able to work together to address our collective concerns about global warming, climate change, sea level rise and ocean acidification. Moreover, unless we shift from divisive talk to meaningful action, our national emissions will continue to grow.

The first part of that shift would be to stop fuelling the division. Let's consider how you and I might be unintentionally stoking that polarization.

A recent story by Dan Kahan in *Scientific American*, "Why Smart People Put Tribe Before Truth," explained the dynamics of this critical problem. His insights apply to all sides of the discussion around the impacts of carbon emissions.

Kahan is a Professor of Law and Professor of Psychology at Yale Law School. His piece in *SA* follows on research summarized in the study "The polarizing impact of science literacy and numeracy on perceived climate change risks," published in the science journal *Nature Climate Change*.

Kahan affirms that "scientific evidence is indispensible for effective policymaking" and that "for a self-governing society to reap the benefits of policy-relevant science, its citizens must be able to recognize the best available evidence and its implications for collective action."

I agree with that; I expect you might, too.

But, Kahan says, this is a dangerously incomplete understanding: "Unless accompanied by another science-reasoning trait, the capacities associated with science literacy can actually impede public recognition of the best available evidence and deepen pernicious forms of cultural polarization."

> "WE USE OUR REASONING not to discern the truth but to form and persist in beliefs characteristic of our group." —*Dan Kahan*

That oft-missing trait is what Kahan and others call "science curiosity." Without it, "as ordinary members of the public acquire more scientific knowledge and become more adept at scientific reasoning, they don't converge on the best evidence relating to controversial policy-relevant facts. Instead they become even more culturally polarized."

This outcome, Kahan says, has been documented experimentally. "Experiments catch these thinking capacities 'in the act': proficient reasoners are revealed to be using their analytical skills to ferret out evidence that supports their group's position, while rationalizing dismissal of such evidence when it undermines their side's beliefs."

Kahan says "it is perfectly rational to use one's reason this way in a science communication environment polluted by tribalism."

According to Kahan, any mistake we make personally about the best available scientific evidence will have "zero impact" on ourselves or anyone we care about. Adopting the "wrong" position in interactions with our peers, however, "could rupture bonds on which we depend heavily for emotional and material well-being."

So instead, Kahan says, we "use our reasoning not to discern the truth but to form and persist in beliefs characteristic of our group, a tendency known as 'identity-protective cognition.'"

On the other hand, Kahan says, "Curiosity has properties directly opposed to those of identity-protective cognition. Whereas the latter evinces a hardened resistance to exploring evidence that could challenge one's existing views, the former consists of a hunger for the unexpected, driven by the anticipated pleasure of surprise. In that state, the defensive sentries of existing opinion have necessarily been made to stand down. One could reasonably expect, then, that those disposed toward science curiosity would be more open-minded and as a result less polarized along cultural lines."

Kahan's description of science curiosity—"a hunger for the unexpected, driven by the anticipated pleasure of surprise"—may not be adequately explanatory for some of us, so I have found a recent local case where scientific evidence was presented to readers as fact, but it was left to the reader to find out what the evidence was and where it came from. If you read this story in the *Times Colonist* and talked with someone else about it but didn't follow up by searching for the source science behind the story, you may be part of the cultural polarization problem. Yes, you.

The story was an op-ed by David Suzuki in the August 18, 2019 edition of the *Times Colonist* titled: "Amid climate crisis, we must change the way we look at land." Suzuki referenced an article by *Guardian* columnist George Monbiot, in which Monbiot argued that a recent IPCC report had failed to acknowledge the real emissions contribution of animal agriculture. Suzuki wrote, "Monbiot argues the report authors underestimate agriculture's contribution to emissions by failing 'to capture the overall impact of food production,' noting, for example, that producing one kilogram of beef protein uses an average of 1,250 kilograms of carbon—'roughly equal to driving a new car for a year, or to one passenger flying from London to New York and back.'"

That was Suzuki quoting Monbiot. There was no additional explanation of where that "1,250 kilograms" came from.

I was startled by the fact that "one kilogram of beef protein uses an average of 1,250 kilograms of carbon." In 2017, per capita beef consumption in Canada was 26.4 kilograms. According to Suzuki, then, Monbiot was claiming an average Canadian's annual beef consumption alone would produce 33,000 kilograms of carbon (26.4 times 1,250 kg). Compare that to the official per capita emission for Canadians: 22,000 kilograms. That's *all* emissions, not just our beef consumption.

I suspect that a lot of the people who read that op-ed would not have questioned the apparently science-based information that Suzuki—perhaps Canada's best-known scientist—was providing. They would simply have absorbed another fact that supported what they already believed about climate change.

I went looking. It turned out that Monbiot's argument was based on a study published in the science journal *Nature* that assessed the carbon costs of different types of food agriculture. The study's authors included in that accounting the "carbon opportunity cost," which is the carbon that *could* be absorbed by land that was currently being used for different types of agriculture *if that land was restored to its natural state*.

This is significantly different than the claim in the Suzuki op-ed in the *TC* that stated, "producing one kilogram of beef protein uses an average of 1,250 kilograms of carbon."

Don't get me wrong. I would like that statement to be true. I've been a vegetarian/vegan for 48 years and would like to believe that my choice has had some positive impact on the environment, and the more the better. But Suzuki's statement is misleading. If you absorbed it as scientific fact, you may be part of the polarization that is holding us back from finding a consensus agreement on how to address climate change. "Who, me?" you ask. Yes, you.

Science has confirmed that any restoration of land to its natural state would likely result in more carbon being absorbed than if that land remains "developed." But this idea isn't confined to animal agriculture or even agriculture in the broadest sense. It also applies to land used to grow trees for harvesting timber and fibre, and the land that has been set aside for such human needs as airports, highways, hospitals, schools, housing—and even bicycle lanes. If bicycle lanes were replanted with trees and cyclists could be turned into pedestrians, much more carbon could be absorbed. But that's not going to happen either, is it?

Suzuki, who is inspirational as a social commentator, was using scientific information to, in Kahan's words, "not discern the truth but to form and persist in beliefs characteristic of [his] group…"

To understand that, I had to exercise what Kahan calls "science curiosity."

We all live in a civilization that, to maintain economic stability, has grown deeply dependent on the energy contained in fossil fuels and the destruction of natural ecosystems. To prevent catastrophic climate change, we need to find a way to reduce emissions and stop ecological destruction. But just as urgently, we need to learn how to stop fuelling division.

David Broadland is the publisher of *Focus*.

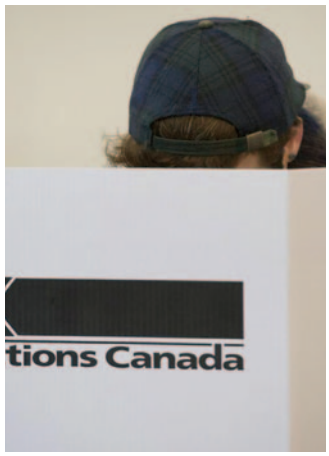
Are local voters shifting to the Greens?

JUDITH LAVOIE

Disillusionment with politics-as-usual could signal a new election landscape on southern Vancouver Island.

Misgivings about the federal Liberals reached the point of no return for David Merner in May last year with the announcement that the government was buying the Kinder Morgan pipeline.

Merner had previously tried to overcome his disappointment at Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's failure to follow through on electoral reform, despite the promise that 2015 would be the last election with first-past-the-post rules, but the pipeline purchase was too much to swallow.



"I thought it was such a terrible mistake, obviously environmentally, but also economically, and I haven't looked back since. That was the culminating point of a long slide…There was just a series of broken promises that led me to believe I could not stay with the Liberal Party," said Merner, who volunteered for the Liberals for 34 years, served on the national executive, and ran as a Liberal candidate in 2015.

The day the pipeline became the property of Canadian taxpayers, Merner joined the Green Party. He is now standing as the Green candidate in Esquimalt-Saanich-Sooke, the riding held by New Democrat Randall Garrison, where four years ago, Merner ran as a Liberal.

Merner's a great catch for the Greens. He's a lawyer, with degrees from Harvard and the Universities of Alberta, Oxford and Toronto. He advised ministers at the Department of Justice and Privy Council Office in Ottawa for 15 years before moving back to BC in 2006 to transform the province's justice system.

It was an easy transition to a new political home, said Merner, who discovered the Green Party is made up of people with similar concerns about traditional-style politics, who switched allegiances from all shades of the political spectrum. "It's gaining its strength from all these other folks like me, who have spent their time in other parties and are saying, 'We just have to do politics differently. We can't have the same-old, same-old type of politics.'"

Merner finds the Green message of civility and collaboration appeals to confrontation-weary voters. "I have been knocking on doors since December, and the number-one message I have been hearing on the doorstep is people are tired and cynical and disappointed," said Merner, who is predicting the October federal election will see the upset of long-time political allegiances, giving the Greens a chance to increase their numbers and, possibly, to wield influence in a minority government.

Crises such as climate change, soaring housing prices, and the opioid epidemic have shaken BC communities, and the Greens offer an alternative to the lack of solutions, said Merner, who will be running against Garrison, Liberal Jamie Hammond, Conservative Randall Pewarchuk, and candidates for the People's Party of Canada and Libertarian Party of Canada.

In 2015, Garrison won with 23,836 votes. Merner—as a Liberal—received 18,622 votes, and the Green candidate ran third with 13,575 votes. The NDP's Garrison, being the incumbent, will be Merner's main competitor. The two have platforms that seem to overlap.

Garrison was first elected in 2011. He's been an environmental activist since his student days and, in 2008, as an Esquimalt councillor, was the first elected official in Canada to move a motion against the Kinder Morgan pipeline.

Garrison was not available for an interview but said in a written statement that he has been one of the most active MPs on the environment and climate change. "I have continued to oppose the Trans Mountain pipeline, to call for an immediate end to all fossil fuel subsidies for the oil and gas industry and to ban all single-use plastics and non-recyclable packaging," he wrote. "As an MP I have also worked hard to build support for a rapid de-carbonization of our economy, but through a transition that leaves no one behind. We can create thousands of new jobs in renewable energy and energy retrofits."

Garrison said he is aware that there have recently been some false statements about his commitment to fighting for the environment and against climate change. "No, I have never supported fish farms, the Site C dam, fracking or building and subsidizing LNG," said Garrison, adding that his personal life reflects a commitment to reducing his carbon footprint and includes living in an energy-efficient home and buying carbon offsets for all his flights."We must all do what we can, but the challenge is so great that only collective action will get us where we must go. Our very survival depends on it," he wrote.

IN THE 2015 ELECTION many voters headed to the polls with single-minded determination to vote for the party with the best chance of throwing out the Stephen Harper Conservatives. Without that type of strategic voting, this election could re-draw the map.

Both the NDP and Greens have dreams of holding the balance of power in a minority government, and Vancouver Island is promising to be a major battleground in the fight for the progressive vote. Michael Prince, University of Victoria political scientist and Lansdowne Professor of Social Policy, said, "This is very different from 2015. That was a different type of campaign, and the Greens got pushed aside as the third or fourth party…Now it's interesting times for the Greens."

In BC, the coastal narrative plays well for the Greens, explained Prince. "It's very much about the natural environment, the pipeline, shipping, the whales, and coastal protection, and that's [Green Party of Canada leader] Elizabeth May's strength. The more that narrative is on the minds of voters here, the more they will be inclined to vote in numbers we haven't seen in the past," he said.

Across Canada, there is growing evidence that Greens are no longer regarded as fringe candidates, with the Green Party of PEI forming the official opposition, three Green MLAs elected in New Brunswick, and one Green MPP in Ontario. In BC, the three-member Green caucus, in an alliance with the NDP government, has seen pet policies and Green input included in legislation, showing British Columbians that power does not necessarily rest solely with the number of seats; the balance of representation is important as well.

> "THIS IS VERY DIFFERENT from 2015. That was a different type of campaign, and the Greens got pushed aside as the third or fourth party…Now it's interesting times for the Greens." —*Michael Prince, UVic*

Merner feels "BC is the model. We have done it in BC, and we can do it nationally. We want to hold the big parties' feet to the fire and make sure that, this time, they follow through on their election promises."

POLLS IN JULY AND AUGUST show a minority Liberal or Conservative federal government is the likely outcome of the October federal election, with the CBC poll tracker projecting the Liberals with five seats more than the Conservatives. According to the mid-August poll tracker analysis, "The Liberals are favoured over the Conservatives to win the most seats, but it's a toss-up whether or not any party can win a majority. The New Democrats are stuck in third and on track to lose potentially more than half of its caucus, while Green support has levelled off after reaching new highs across the country." The poll tracker shows 13.7 percent of the vote going to the NDP, with the Green vote climbing slowly but steadily to 11 percent.

Fundraising tells a similar story, and Elections Canada's website shows that between April and June the Green Party raised $1,437,722, narrowly beating the NDP's $1,433,476. Both parties remain far behind the Conservatives, who raised about $8.5 million, and the Liberals, who brought in more than $5 million in the same quarter.

Currently, the tiny Green caucus, known for punching above its weight, consists of Elizabeth May, who has represented Saanich-Gulf Islands since 2011, and Paul Manly, who won the formerly NDP riding of Nanaimo-Ladysmith in a by-election earlier this year.

May is optimistic that this election is going to see a breakthrough, and that instead of having second thoughts in the voting booth, as has happened in the past, the Green vote will carry through. "The ground has absolutely shifted. This is going to be quite different… We have real strength in ridings across the country," said May.

She agrees that a minority parliament is likely. "This is going to be a very interesting election where we are much more likely, ironically, to have a Parliament that looks as though we have proportional representation—even though Trudeau broke his promise—where many parties have to work together, and that is very exciting for us," she said.

"In this election, anything is possible and, for me, it's much less about the seat count and more about it being a minority and holding what [BC MLA] Adam Olsen so brilliantly calls 'the balance of responsibility,'" said May. She also noted that she is delighted that in most media stories there is now a recognition of four main parties.

May won her riding in 2015 with over 54 percent of the vote. This time she'll be running against New Democrat Sabina Singh, Conservative David Busch, Liberal Ryan Windsor (mayor of Central Saanich), and Ronald Broda for the People's Party of Canada.

Across the country, candidates of all stripes are finding that climate change is a real and present worry among voters who have faced floods, windstorms, and wildfires. May noted, "To make the changes needed to hold on to human civilization, which is my goal, it's pretty essential that this election be about preserving human life on Earth. We don't have anything like years; we have 18 months." Still, she noted that the Greens are not a one-issue party, pointing to a platform that envisions democratic reforms and a sustainable jobs plan—and collaboration, rather than confrontation.

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DANIEL WESTLAKE, A POST-DOCTORAL FELLOW in political studies at Queens University, said an increasing interest in environmental issues, compared to other concerns, bodes well for the Greens and, in some Vancouver Island ridings, they appear more competitive than the Liberals and Conservatives. "There are issues that don't fit nicely along the left/right spectrum—the more traditional divides in Canada—and that's creating opportunities for some of these smaller parties, and particularly the Greens," Westlake said. However, he cautioned, "We shouldn't overstate this. They are still only polling around 10 or 15 percent, but it is enough to make them more competitive than they have been in the past."

New Green voters are likely to come from the NDP and Liberals, Westlake predicted. "It will not just be the NDP; there are a lot of pro-environmental Liberal voters, particularly in Quebec," he said. Westlake also noted that "the Greens are not a traditional left-wing party in the same vein as the NDP, which has a lot of support among low-income and working-class voters." The usual NDP mix can create a divide, he said, as it is difficult to please both the environmental and blue-collar wings. "They are never going to be able to take a position that doesn't alienate some voters, and the Green Party doesn't have to worry about that because they are a pro-environmental party," he said.

A challenge for the NDP across Canada is that more than one-quarter of NDP incumbents are not running again—including Murray Rankin in Victoria—meaning New Democrats lose the incumbent advantage of name recognition.

New Democrats in BC, where the NDP holds 13 of their 41 federal seats, are looking over their shoulders at the Greens, but emphasize that any surge in Green strength will not necessarily come from NDP ranks. All parties will likely be looking to attract votes from Liberals since many who may have voted Liberal in the past are disappointed (or furious) over their about-face on ending the first-past-the-post electoral system, as well as their embrace of the Trans Mountain pipeline, and the evident misbehaviour of the PM's Office involving SNC-Lavalin and former Attorney General (and West Coaster with a new book on the way) Jody Wilson-Raybould. But those votes could be divided up amongst all of the other parties.

IN VICTORIA, NDP CANDIDATE LAUREL COLLINS does have name recognition from her short time on Victoria City Council, and is hoping her municipal record will help win the seat. It's not a clear advantage though, as some Victorians have expressed discontent with her declaring federally so soon after getting elected to council.

The fact that the seat has been solidly NDP since 2006 should work in Collins' favour, though both the Liberals and Green Party are putting forth strong candidates.

In late August, the Liberals nominated Nikki Macdonald, former executive director of government relations at the University of Victoria. She had previously worked for an international pharmaceutical company and before that served in a number of senior roles in the federal government, including as appointments director for former Prime Minister Jean Chretien. Macdonald has deep roots in the federal Liberal Party and is the daughter of long time Liberal politician Donald Macdonald, a cabinet minister under former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau.

Though the Liberal vote dropped to 8,489 compared to 30,397 for New Democrat Murray Rankin in 2015, the Liberals have held the riding in the not-too-distant past: From 1993 to 2006, it was held by former Liberal cabinet minister David Anderson.

In 2015, the Green Party, with candidate Jo-Ann Roberts, was second with 23,666 votes. But Roberts has moved east. Still, Collins acknowledges that her main competition is likely to come from new Green candidate Racelle Kooy who was nominated in February.

Collins feels that disillusionment with the current Liberal government does not extend to the NDP, which is offering a platform of solutions. The housing crisis, climate change, the opiate crisis and inadequate access to health care are among issues that voters want the government to tackle, and the NDP offers an integrated plan, Collins said.

Voters in Victoria care about climate change and the environment—and both concerns are reflected in the NDP platform, she said. "Environmental protection is really the reason I got involved in politics."

Collins also noted that one major difference between the Greens and the NDP is that the NDP's New Deal for the Climate acknowledges that there must be interconnected policy responses that leave no one behind. That means rapidly transforming to a low-carbon economy while also looking at inequalities of the current economy. "Environmental justice and social justice go hand-in-hand," she said.

The Green's Kooy is also finding climate change at the top of the list of concerns, but affordability, housing, homelessness, mental health and addictions follow close behind. "For many people, it's not about themselves. It's about their children," she said.

Kooy will enjoy less name recognition than Collins. Born in North Vancouver, she grew up in the Lower Mainland and has worked for organizations and First Nations across Canada, including a stint as the bilingual co-chair of the Assembly of First Nations. She moved to Victoria from the Xat'sull First Nation in the Cariboo.

"It was the wildfires of 2017 that prompted my move to Victoria," said Kooy. "I have enjoyed the city in the past…and I knew that I could continue my other work from Victoria." When asked if she could be regarded as a parachute candidate, Kooy laughed and asked how many candidates could genuinely claim to be from Victoria. "Prior to my nomination, I did go to Songhees and Esquimalt (First Nations) and asked permission to run in their homeland," she said.

Both Kooy and Collins will likely be campaigning against the Liberal Party's record on proportional representation, the Trans Mountain Pipeline Extension, and the SNC-Lavalin affair, with the recent scathing Ethics Commissioner's report on the subject. Liberal candidate Macdonald, only nominated at the end of August, as *Focus* went to press, will have to defend her party's role on those fronts. Conservative Richard Caron, and Alyson Culbert for the People's Party of Canada are also running in the Victoria riding.

ALISTAIR MacGREGOR, NDP INCUMBENT in the sprawling Cowichan-Malahat-Langford riding, agrees that the NDP strength is marrying environmental and social issues, and he believes NDP numbers will improve once people get into election mode and take a serious look at the platform. "Our party has always been in the vanguard of social change, pushing against the status quo and trying to fight for disadvantaged Canadians, and I think that is still our strength today," MacGregor said, pointing out that the NDP was pushing the envelope on climate change before the Green Party elected any MPs.

"When you are talking about climate change, you have to have a serious plan for workers, and show that there is going to be opportunity in the transition, especially for people in businesses that depend on fossil fuels or who are working in the fossil-fuel industry. You have

to have a concrete plan that shows there are reliable jobs in the clean economy of the future and that we have a transition plan," he said.

MacGregor, first elected in 2015, has served as the NDP's agricultural critic. He has lived in the Cowichan Valley for 25 years, working for former MP Jean Crowder for many of them. In the 2015 election MacGregor received 22,200 votes, followed by Liberal and Conservative candidates in the 14-15,000 range, and the Green Party at 10,462.

MacGregor is unsure whether his main challenge will come from the Greens or Conservatives. "My riding has always had a very strong Conservative base," he said.

The Greens have nominated the former chief of the Cowichan Tribes, Lydia Hwitsum, a highly credentialled lawyer and human rights advocate. MacGregor's Conservative opponent is former Calgary MLA Alana DeLong, who is emphasizing her experience during 14 years in the Alberta Legislature. "I am running because the current federal Liberal government is doing irreparable damage to our country and our children's future," DeLong says on her website. Delong was born in Nelson and now lives on Thetis Island. Others running in the riding are Rhonda Chen for the People's Party of Canada and Liberal Blair Herbert, who was nominated August 22.

WITH THREE OF THE FOUR AREA RIDINGS held by the NDP, and the other by the Green Party, the election battle in this region will be very different than many other ridings across Canada where Liberals and Conservatives are the main contenders.

Green Party deputy leader Jo-Ann Roberts, who ran for the Greens in Victoria in 2015 and is running in Halifax where she now lives, is watching with interest. She thinks that fear of Stephen Harper's Conservatives led the voting in 2015. This time, while people may be upset with the Liberals, there is not the visceral need to get rid of the Harper government. She told *Focus*, "What I heard on the doorstep last time was, 'I would love to vote for you, but maybe next time.' They felt the NDP was the safest way to defeat the Conservatives. Now, if you look at the numbers in Victoria and Vancouver Island, we are 15 percent ahead of the NDP. I would have loved to have seen those numbers."

There is no guarantee, however, that people won't get cold feet about casting a ballot for a non-traditional party once they get into the voting booth. "The Greens can't take anything for granted," Roberts admitted. "We know we have to get people to the polls, and we have limited resources compared to other parties, so we are going to have to pick ridings where we think we can do well."

Daniel Westlake agrees that Victoria and Esquimalt-Saanich-Sooke might well qualify as some of those ridings. They appear to be more competitive than the Liberals or Conservatives in these ridings, said Westlake. "So I don't think, at least on Vancouver Island, that it is going to be strategic voting that hurts the Greens," he said.

That does not mean there won't be swings in public opinion before election day, he said. "It could be a last-minute event that makes voters think about different issues or persuades them to move to another party," he said. "We have to be careful looking at polls. So much can happen between now and October," warned Westlake.

Judith Lavoie is an award-winning journalist specializing in the environment, First Nations and social issues. Twitter @LavoieJudith

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The Cowichan River: loving & logging it to death

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEPHEN HUME

The logic of a watershed, including development and forestry's role in its demise, is playing out sadly in the Cowichan Valley.

Stephen Hume looks over fast water on the Cowichan River in 2004, just before a cycle of recurring summer droughts began to affect summer flows

A near-silent current slips through Willow Run. The jade-green swirl of eddies and back-eddies causes darker reflections of trees to ripple in the August glare. Here and there, the slick surface boils over a hidden boulder, or abruptly sucks down with a wet slurp into some bottom declivity.

I've been coming to the Cowichan River for more than 60 years. It never fails to offer instruction in the mysterious, miraculous, astonishingly complex interconnectedness of the natural world.

For example, running counter to the visible river is a second, invisible stream. Comprised of air, it's evident only by a rustling passage through dangling willow leaves. It flows uphill and upstream, graced occasionally by a gleam of dancing thistledown or a wisp of cottonwood fluff. Every river has an atmospheric doppelgänger ghosting in the opposite direction and pulsing cooler air from the ocean up the veins and capillaries of the watershed. Rivers are not just segments of perception, they are continuums; they connect the sky above the mountains where they rise to the deep sediments of the marine environment where they empty.

Down the centre line of the watercourse, shining through a narrow opening in the forest canopy, a band of brilliant blue sky lays down the image of a third river. It manifests as silken light. Sudden shafts illuminate the slow pools and faster water, highlighting the riffles with a palette of transparencies as the river of liquid slips beneath the river of light. That light brings life to the river, to the aquatic plants and insects that support all the higher forms. It's the seasonal cosmic switch that turns the deciduous riparian cover on and off.

Beneath the mirrored light is yet another river, this one tangible, tactile, comprised of water-worn cobbles and smaller, smoother pebbles. It mumbles and grumbles its way imperceptibly seaward. It, too, has its back-eddies. Exposed flanks of gravel emerge from riverside shallows where they drag more slowly along the banks than does the submerged flow in the main current.

And there's a fifth river here. It, too, is hidden. A river of groundwater flowing parallel to the main stream but slithering beneath it like some dark salamander easing through the seams of fractured bedrock below the gravel.

All rivers simultaneously inhabit these multiple identities. Most of us see only the one we want to see—the one that serves us best.

In the Cowichan's case, many see only the main current. Once it provided a chute for log drives, now it delivers 120 million cubic metres of water to a pulp mill that provides 500 local jobs (and 5,500 elsewhere in BC). It dilutes urban sewage effluent. It irrigates farmers'

“THIS [RIVER] IS THE GEM OF ALL GEMS in this province. And yet we dicker and dicker and dicker over what to do. Everything can only take so much. One day it’s just going to end.”—*Joe Saysell, retired logger*

A tributary of the Cowichan—sensitive trout and salmon habit—gone dry

bountiful fields; offers pools to swimmers; provides a route for canoes, kayaks, the drift boats of angling guides, and the inner tubes of those content with a languid float. It’s also habitat for the fish that bring anglers from around the world.

If we cast dry flies, however, the river of air instructs us which insects are in hatch and which pattern to use. Or, if considering a well, we look to the groundwater that we can tap. Others look to the gravel that can be mined for construction aggregate.

These many-faced reaches of the upper Cowichan River provide prime spawning habitat for chinook and coho salmon and elusive steelhead. For brown, rainbow and cutthroat trout.

But water is dangerously low again this August, following the hottest July in recorded history. Half our summers in the last 20 years have yielded drought—a compelling signal of the “new normal” imposed by global warming. The exposed, sun-bleached flanks of gravel bars bake in the sun. The river narrows. Side channels dwindle to brackish puddles.

And so, another hot, dry season. Another bout of nail-biting angst in the Cowichan Valley for anglers, conservationists, householders, recreational users, mill workers and civic governments, as British Columbia’s blue-ribbon heritage river once again threatens to run dry.

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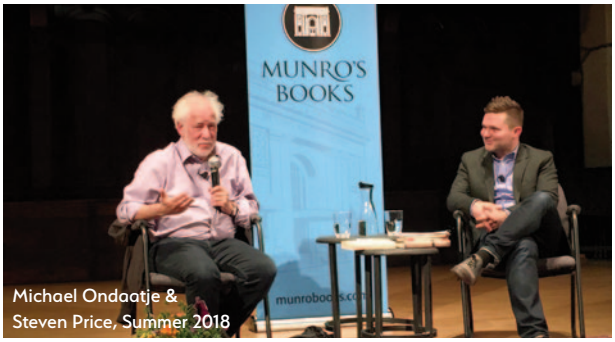

Michael Ondaatje & Steven Price, Summer 2018

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The 62-year-old weir, designed before global warming reduced flows

Development has included swimming rafts, docks and retaining walls

River flows are regulated by a one-metre-high weir at the outlet from Cowichan Lake into the river. The weir, built in 1957, is designed to hold back the water which floods into the lake all winter. This permits summer releases to maintain a flow during dry months, sufficient to sustain fish populations, provide water to the Catalyst pulp mill at Crofton, and dilute sewage discharges at Duncan. Any recreational use comes after these priorities.

The optimum flow is 25 cubic metres per second. The minimum flow for sustaining fish populations is seven cubic metres per second. That's the nominal target. But with a prolonged dry spring and early summer, flows fell below that as early as June. By late July, they hovered around five cubic metres per second, and occasionally dipped to 4.5. If the flow dwindles to 4.3 cubic metres per second, the mill shuts down, affecting not just jobs but $20 million in annual tax revenue and the $1 billion a year it contributes to the provincial economy.

There's a scheme for pumping water over the weir to provide the minimum flow. Counter-arguments arise: it's a false economy that simply delays the inevitable, trading one deficit against another, robbing Peter to pay Paul. Lowering the lake will exacerbate problems for fish stocks—a unique, endangered lamprey, for example, might be seriously threatened, triggering federal species-at-risk protections.

Fishing guides, their double-ended skiffs beached, have already spent days desperately rescuing salmon and trout fry stranded in drying puddles where side-channels of the Cowichan River once ran. They scooped them up in buckets and carried them to the diminishing main stem of the river. Not surprising, since freshwater angling contributes $100 million a year to the Island's economy.

Tributaries supplying Cowichan Lake were dry by early August. Meade Creek looked like a logging road rather than a critical salmon- and trout-rearing nursery. Side channels had weeds carpeting the bottom. Wardroper Creek was the same. None seemed worthy of the forlorn habitat signs designating them "sensitive trout and salmon habitat" and enjoining the public—perhaps "begging" is the better word—to "please protect our heritage."

IF MUNICIPAL AND PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES let things continue as they have, there's not likely to be much heritage left to protect. The river's dry-weather woes are just one symptom in an array of problems whose solution will require a holistic imagination regarding the river, the lake, the surrounding watersheds, and their interconnected value.

Assessed property values in Lake Cowichan rose 16.5 percent in 2019, three times the increase for assessment rates in Oak Bay. New residents are loving the place to death. They have now disturbed more than 30 percent of the shoreline. But it's not just householders.

Forestry accounts for another 48 percent of shoreline disturbance. Logging in the watershed occurs on cycles vastly shorter than originally envisaged. Forest management once called for logged areas not to be harvested again until replanted trees were at least 120 years old. The plan was to let second growth mature until it, too, became old growth. Automation, efficiency and markets brought pressure to harvest on half that cycle. And now, with insufficient wood supply a looming issue, the pressure is on to reduce the logging cycle to 40 years.

Land held for working forest at lower tax rates, and then sold to developers who bid up value for desirable beach-front has sparked a property boom. Subdivisions now sprawl along lakefront once reserved for logging every 100 years.

New householders strip riparian cover to improve views. They install boat docks (there are now 600 of them on the lake), groom natural beaches to remove natural imperfections, and then build concrete retaining walls and embed rip-rap to stabilize banks and control erosion. Wash from powerboats and fluctuating seasonal water levels wear away the modified foreshore once held in place by vegetation.

Joe Saysell, a retired logger who's lived on the Cowichan River for 70 years and is one of those fishing guides who goes out with a bucket to salvage trout and salmon fry, likens the process to death by a thousand cuts. Everybody, he says, reasonably wants to make their own small modification to the landscape for convenience or esthetics, or to increase market value, and few take heed of the unreasonable incremental impacts.

"It all adds up," Saysell says. "Cutting down willows whose roots stabilize the banks so you can have a better view. Taking rocks out of the bottom to create a swimming hole for your kids. Putting in a boat dock and then mooring a boat with a big motor that leaves a big wake. Each one another little nick. But after a while, all those little nicks add up, and you really start bleeding big time. Then, without knowing it, you discover you've cut an artery."

The river, he says, is the small canary in the bigger coal mine shaped by climate change, population pressure, and a dithering failure of political will to address critical problems before they cascade into interconnected catastrophes. "The canary is still alive, but he's really

Retired logger and fishing guide Joe Saysell rescues stranded fry in a drying side channel of the Cowichan River

starting to gasp," Saysell warns. "People don't see things until they've already happened. They don't see it until it's too late."

There's a high-tech analogy. We're all flying along at 10 kilometres altitude in a spanking-new passenger jet. But back there in the cabin, some folks are pulling rivets from the fuselage for souvenirs. The aircraft is over-designed, it's got many redundant safety systems. It can certainly withstand the pulling of a few rivets. But pull enough rivets and eventually you'll come to the one that ensures the integrity of the whole complicated structure. Pull that rivet and the air frame disintegrates.

So, what's the rivet for the ecosystem of which the Cowichan River is just one part? Nobody knows. But, Saysell says, we should now be looking at every problem as though it could be the tipping point.

"Look," he says, "we used to have great steelhead runs into the Englishman River, the Qualicum River, the Nanaimo. Runs that went on year after year. Year after year they went up and down. Then they started going down just a tad more than they went up. Then one year there were none. They were just gone. Overnight. Just like that. I worry that we are going to lose the Cowichan the same way. This [river] is the gem of all gems in this province. And yet we dicker and dicker and dicker over what to do. Everything can only take so much. One day it's just going to end."

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AT 82, DAVID ANDERSON, the former federal fisheries minister, still looks the rangy, raw-boned athlete who won a silver medal in rowing at the 1960 Olympic Games. Loved and hated for his tough conservation policies, he arguably had the biggest impact for West Coast salmon of any fisheries minister before or since. He's now a member of the Cowichan Watershed Board.

Anderson, too, thinks solutions to problems facing the beleaguered ecosystem will be found in a holistic approach. That means, he says, having a mature discussion about the connections between logging in watershed headwaters and downstream problems which, in turn, can have serious implications for industry, municipal governments, and the general public. "We have to take a new look at forest management policies," Anderson says.

Saysell, once a logger himself, concurs. He recently wrote to the provincial government, raising concerns. None of the accelerating changes he's witnessed in logging practice on private lands surrounding Cowichan Lake have been for the better.

"I now see a complete destruction of our watershed, and especially the Cowichan River, all because of irresponsible headwater second-growth logging done on private forest land," says Saysell. "The second growth on our mountains, especially in the Cowichan watershed, is being 'mined' at an unsustainable rate, and is being harvested 60 to 100 years too soon. Proper regulations would require all second growth to be as least 100 to 150 years old before it can be harvested."

He argues that large stands of maturing old growth are crucial for the upper catchment basins of the 53 streams feeding into the watershed, because such forest creates a vast natural blotter. It absorbs rain and delays snowmelt, releasing it gradually throughout hotter, increasingly rain-free summers.

As climate warms, scientists point out, weather extremes are amplified. The outlook for Vancouver Island is for wetter winters and drier summers. It's estimated that summer rainfall into the watershed will decrease by up to 30 percent over the next 30 years, while most of the annual precipitation—less and less of it snow—will occur over a few winter months.

Reducing or eliminating clear-cuts in upper watersheds reduces downslope erosion during heavy winter rains. More old growth creates a better-balanced flow of water into the lake, the river's vast holding tank. Equally important, Saysell says, more old growth provides a mechanism for industry obtaining the same yield but with far less environmental impact.

PHOTO: STEPHEN HUME

Second-growth timber from forest surrounding Cowichan Lake stacked up at a log sort

By allowing trees to mature for 150 years, he says, far less timber must be cut to produce the same quantity of superior quality wood. Thus, while maintaining wood supply, the erosion footprint is greatly reduced, lake and river hydrology are stabilized and made more sustainable, winter range for deer and elk are improved—and mature forests are larger carbon sinks, another way of mitigating global warming.

Anderson, whose great-uncle was a fishing guide on the river a century ago—he used to pole his way upstream in a dugout canoe—says evidence of the impact of watershed logging shows up in the "yo-yo effect" of rapidly rising and falling lake levels following big rain events. Spikes in runoff erode hillsides, cause side-streams to blow out, spill silt into spawning beds, wash away fish eggs, undercut banks, and push torrents of gravel downstream.

What's the solution?

First, Saysell says, the provincial government should intervene. It can end a decade of dithering by corporate, municipal and private interests regarding potential liability, and raise the weir at Cowichan Lake so it holds back more winter rain for summer release.

It's estimated that $10 million would cover the cost of raising and modernizing the weir, although other estimates say it could be done for as little as $3 million. In any event, considering that government spent $12.5 million on three traffic signs to tell drivers to slow down when it's snowing, the amount required to save the river doesn't seem excessive.

By comparison, one bridge replacement in Victoria cost $105 million, a couple of local interchanges cost $120 million, and the regional district estimates a final overall cost of $275 million for upgrading bike routes to "a standard where cyclists of all ages and abilities will feel comfortable."

IN THE BIG PICTURE, perhaps the remaining second growth would be more valuable if it were never cut. The future of the Cowichan Valley is trending to tourism and away from resource extraction. Tourism has generated more than $200 billion in revenue over the last decade in BC, growing by an astonishing 41 percent. It brought more people to BC in 2018 than there are citizens, just over six million.

Consider this example provided by the BC Chamber of Commerce: in 2012, there were plans to log 60 hectares of old-growth timber in a coastal cut block on the North Island. A wilderness kayaking camp was operating in the middle of a proposed clear-cut. The value of the logged timber was estimated at $3.6 million, but the trees could only be logged every 60 years. So, the timber was actually worth about $60,000 a year.

The kayak enterprise, however, brought in about $416,000 a year. It operated every year. Over 60 years it would generate $24,960,000—about seven times the value of the timber. The trees were worth far more, left standing, for the kayak operation, the Chamber acknowledged, than logged.

Does government have the right to impose logging standards and practices on private land? Well it does on mine. I must obtain a permit from the municipality to cut trees, even if I deem them a hazard. And it does on Anderson's. He pointed to a number of Garry oak trees in his back yard that are strictly protected. Similar restrictions govern most small, private property owners.

But Saysell points out that logging companies with timber holdings on private land are not subject to the same forest management policies as those with timber rights on public land. Under the *Private Managed Forest Land Act*, he says, such companies pay far lower taxes than other private land holders. This is purportedly an incentive to replant for future harvesting.

The lower taxes nevertheless represent a subsidy. The public has a right, indeed an obligation, he says, to recover that subsidy, should the company decide to sell forest land for other purposes after logging it. If they sell forest land to developers, Saysell argues, "then they should be taxed at the higher land value [for housing] *retroactively*, right back to the time they first purchased the land."

"In my experience," says Anderson, "if somebody takes the benefit of lower taxes, then the state has a say in management."

Saysell, the former faller, makes a cogent argument for imposing the same management practices, guided by environmental science and rigorous cost/benefit analysis, on both public and private forest land. "Government has to enact new regulations for private managed forest lands, especially for harvesting methods and annual cut rates that will have sufficient rules and laws in them to stop these unsustainable and irresponsible practices that are destroying our beautiful Cowichan River and Cowichan watershed."

Stephen Hume spent half a century as a journalist writing about Western Canada, the North, BC and the Island. His byline has appeared in most major Canadian newspapers. He's the author of nine books of poetry, natural history, history and literary essays.

Is there any demand for Alberta bitumen in Asia?

BRIONY PENN

A retired physics professor ground-truths the tanker traffic at Burnaby's Westridge Terminal.

From his living room window above Westridge Marine Terminal on Burnaby Mountain—the terminus of the Trans Mountain pipeline—retired SFU professor emeritus David Huntley can see the oil tankers coming in to pick up or offload cargo. It's August and Huntley hasn't seen a crude oil tanker at Westridge since June 30. Pulling out his iPad with Vesselfinder.com, Huntley finds the large orange icon that is the closest crude oil tanker and pulls up its information—size, draft, speed, destination, location, port of origin and so on. The next anticipated one, the *Nordbay*, is drifting west of Juan de Fuca Strait, and is not due in until the middle of August. *Nordbay's* recent port of call is Martinez, California, where there is an oil refinery.

"California is where most oil tankers are headed," says Huntley. He tells me only 20 crude oil tankers have left Westridge for China since 2014. Twelve of these were in late 2018 when the Canadian crude price was as low as $11 US per barrel due to a glut of oil in Alberta. When the Alberta premier ordered a curtailment in production, the price jumped back to normal and shipments to China stopped.

Why is a professor with two degrees in engineering and physics and doctoral studies at Oxford tracking these tankers? "Because," states Huntley, "initially what the tankers were doing was inconsistent with the rules on the Vancouver Port Authority website. Now, Trans Mountain and politicians are telling us things that are not true." For instance, as he notes in a recent report, "The numbers commonly quoted from them are an increase from 5 [tankers] per month to 35 per month, an increase of a factor of seven. In the two years before the application, there never were five per month (i.e. 60 per year) as claimed." It's been more like 1.2

Huntley, who built his career on facts and (amongst other things) helping reconstruct the Earth's climate through dating sediments using the physics of sand grains, has turned his focus from understanding this planet's paleoclimate to finding the evidence to protect its future climate.

"What got me interested in the tankers—besides living next to them—is the lack of good solid data on them," he says. "How can we evaluate the effects of the proposed increase of tanker traffic in the Salish Sea that would accompany the TMX [Trans Mountain Expansion Project] without this information?" he asks.

Huntley's findings are in direct contradiction to what we have been led to believe: Kinder Morgan's 2015 business case presented to the NEB stated that "access to Pacific Basin markets is almost non-existent…" Implied is that being able to ship oil to Asia would realize higher prices for Alberta bitumen. As Huntley points out, "These claims about a lack of access to 'tidewater' are without merit since there is—and has been—*guaranteed* access to tidewater. And that access is—and has been—severely underutilized."

Huntley's research has been rigorous, and he has appeared at NEB hearings in the capacity of intervenor, commenter and observer. He has assembled data—names, dates, and destinations—on crude oil tankers from 1974 to the present using various sources: the Pacific Pilotage Authority, Port of Vancouver annual reports, Trans Mountain submissions to the National Energy Board, a document ironically known as CRED (Conversations for Responsible Economic Development) published in 2013, and AIS (Automatic Identification System) with navigational tracking software like Vesselfinder. With these he has done that indispensable form of research called "ground-truthing," i.e., observing first-hand which tankers use the terminal, where they are heading, and whether they leave loaded or empty.

PHOTO: COURTESY KINDER MORGAN

Westbridge Marine Terminal in Burnaby

It should strike anyone as strange that this information has to be assembled by a retired physics professor instead of the pipeline owner, the Government of Canada, to substantiate the business case for

> "THESE CLAIMS ABOUT A LACK OF ACCESS to 'tidewater' are without merit since there is—and has been—*guaranteed* access to tidewater. And that access is—and has been—severely underutilized."—*David Huntley*

buying a $4.5-billion pipeline that requires a further $9.3 billion for expansion, including that of the Westridge Terminal. It seems the government relied on Kinder Morgan's own business case, which was prepared by Neil K. Earnest of Muse Stancil, a Texas oil and gas consultancy. Earnest provided no evidence for his claim that there was "almost non-existent" access to Asian markets—probably because there is no such evidence. Yet the Government of Canada seems to have bought that.

The Westridge Terminal is currently capable of loading over 100 Aframax or 200 Panamax tankers per year. So far this year, the rate is only one per month. And on average, only 30 to 40 tankers a year are loaded, with virtually all of them heading to California, according to Huntley's research. He notes, "It has been rare for Kinder Morgan to exceed 50 percent of [Westridge's] loading capacity, and in 2016 and 2017 it was using less than 15 percent of its loading capacity."

The capacity of the current Trans Mountain Pipeline is 300,000 barrels per day. About 55,000 stays in BC, refined for BC usage. About 170,000 barrels per day—over half of the current capacity—heads south via the Puget Sound Pipeline to four refineries in Washington State. (Some of the refined products are sold back to BC.) Reportedly, the US is interested in bringing in a lot more this way. In an April 2019 podcast interview, the CEO of the new Trans Mountain Crown agency, Ian Anderson, said that new capacity of the expanded pipeline might be soaked up by markets in BC, Washington State or California. He admitted he did not have contracts requiring shipping in tankers. "I've got contracts to move barrels down my pipeline, but those could go to different places, not necessarily over water. So the market will decide how many ships move," said Anderson. The oft-quoted—and for many coastal citizens, worrisome—34 bitumen-laden tankers per month plying coastal waters apparently refers to the maximum physical capacity of the terminal once expanded from its one berth to three.

Another researcher, a 32-year veteran of the Geological Survey of Canada, scientist J.David Hughes, has shown that historically there has been no appreciable price differential between what oil commands from North America versus Asia, making the main case for expansion seem dubious. As Earnest's report for Kinder Morgan put it, TMX "enables Canadian crude oil producers [access to] higher-priced Pacific Basin markets." He projected Asian markets would pay $5–8 more per barrel from 2018 to 2038. Hughes, however, writes "the price in the Far East is $1–3 per barrel lower, plus the transport costs via TMX and tankers will be at least $2 per barrel higher to Asia. Hence building the expansion would mean a loss of $3–5 per barrel compared to shipping oil via new pipelines that will be built long before TMX."

In a recent article, Hughes explains there is a pipeline bottleneck due to the 376 percent growth in oil sands production since 2000, but that "the Line 3 and Keystone XL pipelines…will provide double the export capacity of TMX before its earliest completion date and yield higher prices on the US Gulf Coast compared to the Asian markets that TMX is allegedly being built to access." Huntley notes, "If there were higher-priced Asian markets, the tankers would be going there." He writes, "The existing pipeline and Westridge terminal are capable of supplying world markets with far more oil than they have been doing, at least since 2014."

From Trans Mountain's perspective, one of their most strategic errors was locating a pipeline terminus on the same mountain as a university community of over 20,000 residents. There are a lot of smart people living on that mountain who like facts—starting with biochemistry professor Lynn Quarmby, who successfully led the first challenge to Kinder Morgan back in 2014, and Gordon Dunnett, a retired structural engineer who released a report on the high risk of a catastrophic fire to the 66-year-old storage tanks in the event of an earthquake, and the failure of Kinder Morgan to adequately assess them for failure. There's also John Clague, professor emeritus at SFU, emeritus scientist for the Geological Survey of Canada, and past president of the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of the Province of BC, whose work substantiates the lack of risk assessment. Huntley and these other academic heavyweights are just some of those providing contradictory evidence to claims made by the company and government—evidence which has been underreported by the mainstream media. *Vancouver Sun* reporting has "bordered on nonsense," says Huntley, as do op-eds by industry shills like Stewart Muir from Resource Works, a PR arm of the resource sector.

But if facts aren't guiding the process, then what is? Huntley answers: "Politics and money." If there is no plausible business case, what company is going to invest in the expansion, unless it is heavily subsidized by the taxpayer? Currently, the pipeline and some or all of the associated costs are being paid for out of the Canada Account, which allows the federal government to make large investments in higher-risk ventures if they are deemed in the national interest.

In April 2019, the international Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) produced a report characterizing the project as "built on quicksand and clear as mud" with "no full accounting of ongoing operations" (see http://ieefa.org). It states: "The government has an obligation to tell its citizens how much the Trans Mountain Pipeline Project is costing."

Perhaps with the October federal election coming, Canadians will demand such answers. But the IEEFA report also notes that getting answers might prove difficult: "The Canadian government has already routed payments to fund and develop the pipeline through a maze of government agencies with different missions, reporting mechanisms and accounting standards."

The other question is: What exactly is in the national interest?

Email huntley@sfu.ca for David Huntley's report on tankers at the Westridge Marine Terminal.

Briony Penn is an award-winning writer of creative nonfiction books including the prize-winning *The Real Thing: the Natural History of Ian McTaggart Cowan*, and most recently, *Stories from the Magic Canoe with Wa'xaid (Cecil Paul)*.

Fabricating jobs *and* hastening climate catastrophe

RUSS FRANCIS

Your tax dollars at work: LNG Canada is creating much-needed employment in Zhuhai, China.

Artist rendering of the LNG Canada project at Kitimat

An oft-touted highlight of the liquefied natural gas (LNG) cult is the vast number of jobs it will bring to BC Liberal-voting regions in northern British Columbia. As recently as June 9, 2019, LNG Canada said in a statement that its Kitimat project "will bring 10,000 jobs during construction." In case any doubting Thomases were still unclear, the federal government enhanced the number in a June 25, 2019 news release, claiming that the LNG Canada facility "will ultimately create over 10,000 jobs."

Alas, it is not to be. According to the latest company overview on the LNG Canada website, the number working at the Kitimat site will peak at "4,500 people." So where are the other 5,500?

The Texas company leading the construction offers a clue as to where at least some of the 5,500 are hiding. Fluor Corporation—which holds the construction contract in a joint venture with Japan-based JGC Corporation—boasted to investors on August 2, 2018 that it had cut on-site jobs by "over 35 percent," in part due to its use of "fabrication capabilities" to perform much of the LNG Canada work. So where are these wonderful fabrication capabilities? In Prince Rupert? Terrace? Burns Lake? Smithers? Surely in BC?

Well, er, not as such. Not even in North America.

The site is in Zhuhai, China. The "fabrication yard," in Guangdong province, not far from Hong Kong, is huge: more than 200 hectares—roughly three times the size of Beacon Hill Park. It's another Fluor joint venture, this time with the Offshore Oil Engineering Company—controlled by the Beijing-based China National Offshore Oil Corporation. That's where the LNG "modules" that form the guts of the facility are being built. Well done, BC and federal governments: The $7.3 billion-and-counting handouts to LNG Canada are boosting employment in the world's second-largest economy—in a country that is not exactly on Canada's Christmas list these days.

Meanwhile, on August 1, 2019, Fluor revealed what executive chairman Alan Boeckmann called "serious" issues with the company's performance, saying he was "extremely disappointed" in its results. In the three months ending June 30, the company lost $555 million US. It canned both its chief executive officer and its chief financial officer, and to bring in cash, it is selling off real estate and cashing in some insurance policies.

Among Fluor's worries are fixed-price contracts; it will no longer bid on some of them. In a fixed-price contract signed last year, Fluor and JGC agreed to build the Kitimat plant for $14 billion US, even though Fluor has never before constructed an LNG export facility.

Fluor's shares have continued to fall—plummeting from $58.61 when LNG Canada gave the final go-ahead on October 1, 2018 to $17.38 on August 16, 2019—a 70 percent drop in less than 11 months. Newly hired chief financial officer Carlos Hernandez told investors in a conference call August 1 that although the LNG Canada project is in its early stages, it was "on schedule and on budget." However, Fluor plainly had some concerns about the Kitimat contract. "We brought up a number of expats to augment our critical activity there," Hernandez said in the call.

Apart from all the jobs that the LNG fustercluck is *not* creating in Canada, what about a much larger worry: How much damage will the LNG facility do to the planet?

In June 2019, the San Francisco-based Global Energy Monitor published *The New Gas Boom*, a report on the 166 LNG export plants now being developed worldwide. The report includes detailed

> **"IT'S SHOCKING that the Canadian and British Columbia governments would shell out billions of dollars for this—it's crazy."**—*Global Energy Monitor executive director Ted Nace*

estimates of emissions from LNG production, transport and combustion—and they are a lot higher than what the BC government and LNG Canada would have us believe. For instance, the BC government claims that the LNG facility itself will produce 4.2 million tonnes (Mt) of GHGs per year once the plant is operating at its full capacity, 28 million tonnes of LNG annually. (GHGs are measured in carbon dioxide equivalents, or CO2e.) That's just the plant itself, not counting the emissions from fracking the gas out of the ground, from sending it through the 670 km Coastal GasLink pipeline to Kitimat, from transporting the LNG to Asia, and from burning it.

Using data from the Global Energy Monitor report, LNG Canada's Kitimat facility alone will, in fact, produce 8.7 Mt of GHGs annually—more than twice the BC government's claim. And including emissions from all the other parts of the chain, LNG Canada will be adding no less than 124.9 Mt annually to the world's planet-wrecking emissions. That is roughly one-sixth of Canada's total GHG emissions (716 Mt) in 2017.

Ted Nace is the executive director of Global Energy Monitor, and a co-author of the report. In an interview, Nace pointed to the quickly-dropping total costs of renewable energy, taking into account capital costs, estimated lifetime, the discount rate, and maintenance costs, among other factors. A November 2018 Lazard Bank report found that wind power is now cheaper or comparable in cost to the most efficient gas turbines in all six economies studied. As well, solar electricity and other renewable energy sources are cheaper than many other fossil fuel types. Said Nace: "In terms of displacing coal, economically LNG is not competitive with renewable power in Asian markets."

As for the purported high-efficiency gas turbines that LNG Canada says it will use to compress natural gas into liquid form, GHG emissions from the actual turbines are negligible, resulting in only around seven percent of LNG's life-cycle emissions. "It's not going to change much," Nace said. "It's shocking that the Canadian and British Columbia governments would shell out billions of dollars for this—it's crazy."

Not content in doling out $1 billion in tariff waivers for the imported modules, on June 24, 2019, federal Minister of Finance Bill Morneau hiked it up to Kitimat to re-announce Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's October 2, 2018 $220 million gift to the foreign consortium, purportedly to "help fund highly energy-efficient gas turbines minimizing both greenhouse gases and fuel use."

Reduce GHGs? By how much? The announcement didn't say, and when I asked Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, a spokesman referred me to LNG Canada. Did the feds have no idea of the impact on GHG emissions before doling out their $220 million gift to Royal Dutch Shell and its four equally foreign partners? Still interested in learning by how much the $220 million would cut emissions, I dutifully asked LNG Canada. In response, I received a statement attributed to Susannah Pierce, LNG Canada's director of external relations. After insisting that the facility is expected to have a GHG intensity 30 percent lower than the best currently operating LNG plants, the statement included this gem: "The grant will not be used for further GHG reductions."

The feds turned over $220 million to LNG Canada to help it buy turbines they were going to buy anyway? It sounds an awful lot like the old "get the money out the door" syndrome that afflicts governments worldwide. Despite all the babble about minding the public purse, etc, etc, in practice, the worst possible outcome for a government agency is to *underspend* its budget. Why? Because then looms the mortal terror that the agency would get that much less in next year's budget.

The increasing corporate welfare payments that support boosting GHG emissions might be less worrisome if we had another decade or two to start cutting emissions. We do not. According to last year's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, if we want to keep the global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, we have until the end of 2020 to start cutting GHG emissions. If the Earth is to remain habitable, *GHG emissions must peak in a little over one year from now*.

Here's a much more effective and much cheaper suggestion to reduce GHGs resulting from the plant: Stop building it—now. With most of the fabrication jobs going to China, the rest of the LNG plant-building ones are a short-term prospect, comparable to hula hoop manufacturing. Still, jobs are needed in those northern BC communities.

Federal Green Party leader Elizabeth May has worked out a potential solution: On August 7, she proposed a plan to help workers transfer from fossil fuels to renewable energy, to retrofit buildings for higher energy standards, and to clean up the environmental mess left at wells abandoned by oil and gas companies.

Supposing that it finally sees the light, can the BC government get out of the horrendous LNG Canada mess? Of course. In case any carbon-head isn't convinced, paragraph 15.12 in the March 2019 *Operating Performance Payments Agreement* between BC and LNG Canada spells it out:

"Proponent [LNG Canada] expressly acknowledges and agrees that nothing in this Agreement will be construed as an agreement by the Province to restrict, limit or otherwise fetter in any manner the Province's ability to introduce, pass, amend, modify, replace, revoke or otherwise exercise any rights or authority regarding legislation, regulations, policies or any other authority of the Province."

Or, as former NDP forests minister David Zirnhelt put it more succinctly in September, 1996: "Don't forget that government can do anything."

Of course, should BC shut down LNG Canada, corporate lawyers would promptly roll up their sleeves, put down payments on luxury yachts, and see how much more they could extract from the Province for interfering with their natural-born right to help make Earth unlivable. It is entirely possible that they might settle for a lot less than $6 billion. After all, even the most fossilized litigants might come to realize that there are no corporate lawyers on a dead planet.

Russ Francis, a former BC government analyst, now wonders whether the climate crisis may soon necessitate a modification of Heraclitus's maxim: Before long, we may not be able to step into the same river *once*.

Antidepressants and the myth of the "chemical imbalance"

ALAN CASSELS

Psychiatrist Dr Joanna Moncrieff says "often there are better ways to deal with things" than taking drugs.

It is only after a few seconds into my conversation with Dr Joanna Moncrieff, a psychiatrist based in London, UK, when her fresh perspective on psychiatry strikes me.

"I think mental illnesses are more like aspects of our personality than they are illnesses that come over us. People can struggle with their feelings and behaviour, but usually they can learn ways to manage and deal with them. Sometimes that might involve taking drugs, but often there are better ways to deal with things."

The British psychiatrist is a leading figure in what is known, broadly speaking, as the critical psychiatry movement. As the author of several books including *The Myth of the Chemical Cure*, Dr Moncrieff is a prominent critic of the modern "psychopharmacological" approach to treating mental health challenges.

She is in Vancouver next month as the keynote speaker at a conference for BC physicians and pharmacists, and agreed to speak with me in advance of her trip. Our wide-ranging discussion delved into how society uses an array of psychiatric drugs including antipsychotics, drugs for ADHD, and antidepressants.

It is the latter class of drugs—antidepressants—that I want to focus on, particularly because I want to try to understand one simple fact: why are so many of us taking them? A study released this August found that 8.8 percent of Canadians between the ages of 40 and 79 took an antidepressant in the last month. In the US, that number is 15.4 percent. When you tease apart the utilization data on these drugs, you find women are twice as likely as men to be on an antidepressant. In British Columbia, close to 20 percent of women between ages 19 and 55 are taking an antidepressant. Canadian data from 2016 found that 60 percent of seniors in long-term care are on antidepressants (compared with 19 percent of seniors living in the community). With a bit of census data and some quick math, I roughly calculate that in Greater Victoria alone, there are close to 30,000 women under 65 who are taking an antidepressant.

Let's be clear, depression can be serious and debilitating, and there should be no stigma associated with taking an antidepressant or on any drug that is helpful; yet at the same time, these kinds of statistics raise many questions. If one in five women in Victoria are on an antidepressant, why? Is depression really as widespread as the drug stats might indicate? Does this really indicate that a lot of people are medically sick and receiving an effective treatment, or are we medicalizing the ordinary difficulties of life? To be fair, antidepressants are prescribed for a variety of things, including anxiety, obsessive compulsive behaviour, premenstrual symptoms, and panic disorder, among others. But most of their use would likely be linked to persistent sadness and hopelessness.

I asked Dr Moncrieff how we arrived at this point. She quickly pointed to a number of factors, particularly that taking mood-altering drugs is not a new phenomenon. For nearly half a century, women especially have been plied with drugs such as benzodiazepines or barbiturates for anxiety and depression. One way to explain this, she said, is that "women might be more likely to internalize their distress. Men are more likely to get angry and drink. Men are likely to blame outwardly."

Dr Joanna Moncrieff

As for the statistics, she's as astonished as I am: "It's extraordinary, isn't it? It's an indicator of a number of factors—there are a pool of people whose lives are miserable, who go to the doctor looking for a solution; years ago they would have been put on a benzo, or a barbiturate, and so on." She noted some people do seek a chemical solution to their problems—but, she added, "this view reflects the huge marketing efforts that happened in the 1990s." This coincided with the first Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor (SSRI) type of antidepressant, Prozac, coming into use. In her estimation, when it became apparent that benzodiazepines like Ativan, Valium or Xanax "were being handed out like sweets, that's when the drug industry came up with this idea of the chemical imbalance, in association with launching the new SSRI antidepressants." Prozac was followed by other drugs intended to alter serotonin in the brain, like Zoloft, Paxil, Effexor and others.

The "chemical imbalance" theory is one of the biggest controversies in psychiatry; it is often hauled out to explain a person's depressed mood, and how a drug which tweaks the level of serotonin in the brain might actually help. The problem is that there is little, if any, proof to support such a theory. "The evidence for a link between serotonin and mental illness is all over the place," said Dr Moncrieff. "The idea that psychiatric drugs are tweaking some underlying abnormality is completely misleading," yet this hasn't stopped these drugs from becoming the mainstay treatment for depression.

> "If you tell a person going through depression that they need a drug, you are giving them a message that they are biologically abnormal. Not only are drugs chemicals that interfere with normal biological response, the 'chemical imbalance' idea is also disabling."—*Dr Joanna Moncrieff*

The automatic prescribing of antidepressants, in Moncrieff's opinion, is fraught with problems. "If you tell a person going through depression that they need a drug, you are giving them a message that they are biologically abnormal. Not only are drugs chemicals that interfere with normal biological responses," she says, "the 'chemical imbalance' idea is also disabling. It often ends up with the patient trying one, then another, then another different drug. They just end up being on a cocktail, because none of them actually work," she said.

While some sorts of psychiatric drugs can help some people some of the time, Moncrieff believes other factors are likely leading to society's over-reliance on antidepressants. As Jiddu Krishnamurti famously said: "It is no measure of health to be well-adjusted to a profoundly sick society." There is no shortage of adverse societal influences causing many of us to feel anguish and despair. Dr Moncrieff's UK perspective includes "things such as austerity, following the financial crash in 2008—and a general income drop in the last few years—that has likely created a genuine large amount of distress and misery." And let's not forget more recently that her country has been dealing with the deep uncertainty caused by Brexit, undoubtedly adding anxiety to peoples' lives.

While it might be understandable why so many people are initially put on antidepressants, the question arises, how come so many people stay on them for the long haul? Part of this has to do with dependence. As Joanna Moncrieff says, "Some antidepressants are very difficult to get off—many people don't realize they have withdrawal symptoms. They try to stop, and they think they have a relapse, and it confirms their status as a patient."

Moncrieff agreed the very mention of "withdrawal symptoms" associated with SSRIs is controversial. Earlier this year, a newsletter produced for BC doctors and pharmacists by the Therapeutics Initiative was attacked by a vocal Vancouver psychiatrist who dismissed the seriousness of the withdrawal effects of SSRI antidepressants.

Yet the notion of dependency is gaining traction. Moncrieff cited a recent high-profile example published earlier this year in the medical journal *The Lancet*. Author Mark Horowitz wrote: "All classes of drug that are prescribed to treat depression are associated with withdrawal syndromes. SSRI withdrawal syndrome occurs often and can be severe, and might compel patients to recommence their medication." Patients have reported such symptoms as nausea, headache, dizziness, chills, body aches, paresthesias, insomnia, electric-shock-like sensations, panic attacks, dramatic mood swings, suicidal thoughts, and exhaustion. Horowitz's coauthor, David Taylor, the director of pharmacy and pathology at a London hospital, described his own withdrawal from Effexor as a "strange and frightening and torturous" experience that lasted six weeks in a recent *New Yorker* article. Instead of denying the existence of withdrawal symptoms, these two authors make a strong case for tapering antidepressants *very* slowly.

Among the known side effects of antidepressants are those affecting sexual function. Dr David Healy, a psychiatrist from Wales, runs a website that tracks the effects of SSRI antidepressants (RxISK.org) and other drugs. For many years, he has been collecting data from real-world patients who reported losing their sexual function even after stopping their antidepressant. Healy has used these data to petition the European Medicines Agency to put a warning about persistent sexual dysfunction on these drugs. Moncrieff, who is very familiar with this literature, reminded me that often the studies on antidepressants are simply too short to detect the effects such as long-term sexual dysfunction.

In terms of SSRIs' effectiveness on depression, Moncrieff said, "sometimes [patients] feel better, sometimes they don't." With her own patients, she said, "I couldn't convince myself that antidepressants were having any significant effect. Some have said they're basically active placebos."

A large meta-analysis (a summary of a large number of studies in the same area) published last year was reported extensively in the media with the message "antidepressants do work!" But Dr Moncrieff found many flaws. "They looked at response rates which inflate the actual effects, [whereas] if the results are looked at in the usual way, the analysis showed a very small and clinically irrelevant effect." Moreover, she pointed out, in this meta-analysis, "an awful lot of those studies were withdrawal studies." They studied people who were on antidepressants, comparing those who continued on their regimen to those who were switched to a placebo. So instead of measuring the effects of the SSRIs, they were finding that those switched to the placebo were doing worse—probably because they were suffering withdrawal symptoms.

MONCRIEFF HAS A DIFFERENT APPROACH to mental illness and its treatments than many other physicians. She spends a lot of time helping patients get off psychiatric drugs, but also trying to avoid putting patients on them in the first place. She told me most cases of depression "are responses to things that happen in people's lives—and we need to figure out ways to help people to manage or address their problems—it's dealing with the causes." She mentioned a number of options—CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy), exercise, and mindfulness training, among them—that enable people to manage their mood or anxiety in a non-drug way.

When a patient says, "I've done all those things and nothing works," she recommends physicians discuss with those patients the evidence on antidepressants, how there is little to support their effectiveness, as well as the pros and cons of medication. She said that if antidepressant medication is prescribed, it should be viewed as a short-term measure, one which needs constant review and a willingness to stop.

This is the evidence-based message she'll be bringing to BC doctors in Vancouver on October 5 at a conference sponsored by the Therapeutics Initiative (see www.ti.ubc.ca).

Alan Cassels is a drug policy researcher in Victoria.

In Victoria, no one is watching the watchers

BARBARA JULIAN

Can the rise of surveillance in our culture and city coexist with an authentic right to privacy?

We are under surveillance everywhere: malls, offices, hospitals, buses, airports and streets. Ubiquitous CCTV cameras break down barriers between private and public life and erode not only privacy but independent thinking. Surveillance is a herding technique which builds group-think, as psychologist Bruno Bettelheim discovered in Nazi prisons.

To spend a day unseen is becoming a luxury rather than a choice. How did we let a fundamental freedom like privacy slide away? Privacy laws in Canada are weak. The Office of the Privacy Commissioner administers the federal *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* (PIPEDA), and in BC, privacy comes under the *Personal Information Protection Act*. Privacy commissioners, however, merely suggest limits to surveillance, their Guidelines stating that "Cameras that are turned on for limited periods…are preferable to 'always on' surveillance. Cameras should be positioned to reduce capturing images of individuals who are not being targeted." This is hardly a robust defense of Canadians' right to privacy.

Police, of course, think their job easier when surveillance is ubiquitous (witness the way criminals are tracked in reality *and* in crime dramas). And an aggressive home-security industry with products to sell has convinced many homeowners that without security cameras surrounding their houses, they are in danger.

Yet concerned organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union argue "the expense of an extensive video surveillance system such as Britain's—which sucks up approximately 20 percent of that nation's criminal justice budget—far exceeds the limited benefits." (The British Security Industry Authority estimated in 2013 that there is close to one CCTV camera in the UK for every 11 people, or over five million cameras in total.)

The CRD operates about 75 CCTV cameras, most in watershed areas, recreation centres, and the Hartland Landfill. The CRD governs its own use of surveillance, for which a Privacy Impact Assessment is prepared, but it doesn't monitor private or business cameras. "If someone who lives in the CRD wanted to put in a surveillance system on their personal property, that is up to them and we do not track or monitor it," said Kristen Morley, general manager of Corporate Services at the CRD. Each municipality creates its own policy, but when asked, the municipalities can't say where cameras are located within their boundaries.

The City of Victoria doesn't issue licenses for or keep statistics on cameras, but according to its Information Access and Privacy Analyst, Rob Gordon, "these do collect personal information," and therefore "must comply with [BC's] *Personal Information Protection Act*, and… the [federal] *Freedom of Information and Protection Act*." These laws do little to keep those who don't want to be seen from being seen.

Picture yourself setting forth for a walk. You're enjoying time off and a chance to be alone—but are you alone? How many devices are recording every window you pause in front of, every item you buy or cafe you visit? For how long will this movie you never wanted made of your life be in circulation? Is "having a day to yourself" but a quaint notion from the past? You are not being paranoid if this bothers you. In some cultures, people thought that to take someone's picture was to steal their soul. It may not involve the soul, but the snatched snap does feel like a form of theft, or rape (from the Latin *rapere*, to snatch).

Or picture yourself enjoying an intimate restaurant dinner for two. Sitting *tête-à-tête*, you happen to look up, and there's that black globular lens on the wall: a third presence sits a mere six feet away.

Online surveillance is, of course, equally pervasive. Our banking records, buying habits, memberships, social media contacts, and geographical movements are all harvested by government and corporate watchers. With the advent of "smart cities," there are ever fewer places to hide—or merely enjoy some anonymity. Smart cities are networks of electronic sensors providing permanent surveillance; in exchange, residents are promised instant connectivity, autonomous vehicles, home/work meshing, and alternative energy sources. The "internet of things" extends this connectivity into the home, as well as around it: our own appliances are spying on us. Promoters advertise these gifts of technology as if Santa Claus had come to town. The downside is that "he sees you when you're sleeping, he knows when you're awake."

Waterfront Toronto is developing a "smart city" using satellites in partnership with Sidewalk Labs, a sister company of Google-Alphabet. Toronto entered into this partnership without participation by elected councillors, and observers feel that taxpayers haven't had sufficient involvement in the enterprise.

So-called smart cities promote the use of bluetooth beacons in stores, hotels and other public places. Beacons contain tiny hidden sensors that track customers through apps on their phones which send information to a server showing where customers linger while shopping. You get promotional messages for nearby products as you move through the aisles. You don't need to download these apps, for "location-marketing" firms sell the codes to smartphone software developers, and Google and Apple slip them unannounced into the apps you choose to download.

If that's not Orwellian enough, consider that the owners of beacon systems use behaviour and probability studies to create "mindset targeting techniques" that predict what advertising you'll be susceptible to. Alexis Morris of Ontario College of Art and Design University explains that this technology is designed to "understand…how we're feeling." A normal person would be feeling stalked, but it gets creepier: Morris describes smart cities that offer "mixed reality," where the physical world is "braided through with digital information" and "we could have a virtual object that jumps out of a physical object…like an avatar…"

Or a spy. Is the smart city starting to resemble an open prison? It seems it's not only wild foxes who are wearing location collars. So far, no store in the CRD reports the use of bluetooth beacon surveillance. But it's coming.

The smartphone is addictive, and the dangers of being addicted to a tool of surveillance are obvious. The next version (5G) will record our whereabouts at any given moment, but telecommunications marketers lure us with convenience and our need to belong. For these we have forfeited privacy and anonymity.

HOW MANY DEVICES are recording every window you pause in front of, every item you buy or cafe you visit? No one knows.

The BC Civil Liberties Association notes that video-spying and over-policing have grown in tandem, as in the use of highway cameras and the aggressive roadside procedures that go with them. Police patrol cars have long used cameras with licence plate recognition technology, and now police officers are beginning to wear body cameras suited to facial-recognition software. VicPD installed CCTV cameras at Car Free Day and Symphony Splash. And as we learned recently through the BC Civil Liberties Association, CSIS (Canadian Security Intelligence Service) was willing to spy on environmental organizations like Sierra Club and Dogwood BC.

Increasingly, CCTV cameras utilize facial-recognition software, which the British privacy defender Big Brother Watch calls an "authoritarian surveillance tool." It makes covert biometric checks of people attending a festival or protest rally, matching faces with images on police databases. A recent *Washington Post* editorial entitled "The Facial-recognition Future We Feared Is Here," noted that both FBI and Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents had asked states to run facial-recognition searches on their driver's license databases; the editorial had urged Congress to "pass a law limiting the use of this powerful tool to when it is warranted and necessary."

Of course, it doesn't help that many of us are complicit, not only in being watched, but in being watchers. Watching others is packaged as entertainment: we are invited, through reality TV and Facebook, to perceive invasion of privacy as a spectator sport.

No group like Big Brother Watch has emerged yet locally to fight for freedom from surveillance-creep. No one has called for camera-free zones like activists once did for smoking-free zones, yet surveillance, too, is known to cause health problems. "Researchers have found that as surveillance increases, so does anxiety, leading in turn to high blood pressure, obesity and respiratory and gastrointestinal problems," according to the health blog *Good Therapy*. A study of workplace video monitoring in the island nation of Mauritius concluded that "surveillance…is used as a basis for power. To gain power over employees, companies deny individuals an unobserved space; not allowing an individual to have the necessary unobserved space is a lack of respect." For "employees" we might substitute "residents" and ask where in the CRD we can guarantee we remain respectfully unobserved.

Citizens themselves could pinpoint locations of cameras in their neighbourhoods and create maps for those who wish to avoid them, but avoidance may be all but impossible. As they've multiplied, we've become used to them, frog-in-boiling-water style. A "learned helplessness" has kicked in, which happens when someone is repeatedly subjected to an aversive stimulus which cannot be escaped.

Surveillance grows with population growth. People living in small towns can only hope they will stay small enough not to get too "smart." Maybe really private people will withdraw into non-smart countryside—hiding in a fairy-tale cottage in the woods perhaps? Once the privilege of the commoner, anonymity is becoming a legendary fantasy from the past.

S.B. Julian dodges cameras up and down Vancouver Island while investigating local history and ecology.

September & October Events

PROGRAMS IN EARTH LITERACIES

Nature & Psyche
with **Layman Pascal** (Sept 10 – 17) **& Gertie Jocksch SC** (Sept 24 – Oct 1)
4 Tuesdays, Sept 10 – Oct 1, 10am – 12pm, May 7 – 28
$75 or $20 drop in
Church of Truth, 111 Superior Street

Jennifer Berezan & Chris Webster in Concert
September 27, 7:30 – 9:30pm
$35
Church of Truth, 111 Superior Street

Music and Mindfulness, Sound and Silence as a Path to Awakening
with **Jennifer Berezan**
September 28, 9:30am – 4:30pm
$125
Friend's Meeting House, 1831 Fern Street

The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos
by **Brian Swimme** with **Margaret Walters** and **Val Murray**
4 Tuesdays, October 8 – 29, 10 am – 12 pm
$75 or $20 Drop in
Friend's Meeting House, 1831 Fern St. Victoria

Becoming a New People for a New Planet: Exploring the Dynamism of Nature
with **Ilia Delio PhD**
Here we will explore Teilhard de Chardin's vision of planetization.
Lecture, Friday Oct 18, 7 – 9 pm. $25
Workshop, Saturday Oct 19, 10 am – 4 pm. $125
Canadian Memorial United Church, 1806 W.15th Ave. & Burrard St. in Vancouver

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Huggett's Greatest Hits

DAVID BROADLAND

The new bridge broke down after little more than a year of service. What else did the project's leadership bequeath future taxpayers?

On June 25, just shy of 15 months after it opened, the new $115-million-plus Johnson Street bridge was unofficially broken. The City officially acknowledged the problem on June 27. A mechanical issue—the exact nature of which has yet to be revealed—had caused abnormally high pressure in the bascule bridge's hydraulic lift system. The bridge could not be opened for waiting marine traffic.

Twelve days later, on July 6, the bridge was still not operating properly. On that day the City's Director of Public Works and Engineering Fraser Work told the *Times Colonist*, "I'm not staring down the barrel of a huge, big maintenance burden or a huge, big replacement of gear and equipment. No one is talking about anything like that. It's just about proving the system is working the right way and making sure we get the confidence back in the system."

In July, *Focus* filed an FOI requesting the record of Work's communications regarding the breakdown. The partially redacted record provided by the City shows that critical elements of the hydraulic system were failing, including o-rings coming off pressure filters, plastic filter end caps degrading, and indicators designed to show when filters were clogged indicating the filters were clogged even though new filter elements had been installed. The question of whether all these elements were failing simultaneously because their manufacture had been defective, or, alternatively, that they were all failing because they were experiencing higher fluid pressure than they were designed for, is not answered by the released records.

The records show that suppliers of the failing equipment from as far away as Florida travelled to Victoria for consultation.

Even after equipment that had failed was replaced, warning indicators kept triggering. The record provided shows that, after new equipment had been installed, the speed of lifts and lowerings had to be reduced to slightly more than half-speed. Presumably that condition is still in effect.

If the bridge's hydraulic system is now operating at higher pressure than it was a year ago, the hydraulic drive motors may be experiencing greater mechanical resistance. One possible explanation for greater mechanical resistance is that the rings on which the bridge rotates have slowly deformed since the counterweights were attached in early 2018. Kiewit Construction, one of the companies that bid for the construction contract in 2012, warned the City of that possibility. They noted that the counterweight "would load the truss ring eccentrically, which could distort the ring—a highly undesirable condition." Kiewit rejected the City's novel mechanical lifting system in favour of a system that had proven to be reliable over many years of service.

If the rings have deformed, as Kiewit engineers predicted they might, the drive system would encounter greater resistance than expected when the bridge was being lifted or lowered, and thus would operate at higher hydraulic pressure.

Notably absent from the City's public explanation of the bridge's hydraulic system failure was the formerly high-profile Project Director Jonathan Huggett.

Focus has raised questions over the ten years it took to build the bridge about the value of the services provided by consulting engineers like Huggett. The emergence of the hydraulic problem adds yet another layer to those questions. In a written quarterly report to City council in April 2018, soon after the bridge opened, Huggett advised councillors: "Maintenance of the new bridge is expected to be minimal, with the main item being greasing of the joints and moving surfaces from time to time. The hydraulic system is a closed system, meaning there is little opportunity for outside contaminants to enter the hydraulic system, and so maintenance is minimized."

The bridge's current hydraulic problems show that Huggett's expensive advice was actually expensive nonsense. There are other, even more striking examples of Huggett's advice not serving the public interest. I think of them as Huggett's Greatest Hits.

In 2015, *Focus* published a story about a document we had obtained through an FOI request to the City. This document, titled *Johnson Street Bridge Seismic Design Criteria*, had been quietly created by the City's project manager, MMM Group, in August 2012 while the City struggled to obtain a financially viable bid to construct the bridge. It was later attached to the construction contract the City signed with PCL. By accepting the provisions of the *Seismic Design Criteria* as part of the contract, the City accepted a much lower level of seismic performance than had been originally recomended by MMM's own Joost Meyboom.

For example, the *Criteria* stipulated that following a large Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake, access to emergency vehicles only needed to be "possible within days of the earthquake." Yet Meyboom had advised the City to accept only a performance level that would provide uninterrupted, *immediate* access across the bridge for emergency vehicles after any earthquake.

The worst-case earthquake scenario for Victoria is not a Cascadia Subduction Zone event. Provincial emergency planners know that the rupture of a fault much closer to Victoria, like the Devil's Mountain Fault, could produce a M7+ earthquake centered only a few kilometres from downtown Victoria. Such an event would produce much stronger seismic waves, albeit for a shorter period of time, than a Cascadia Subduction Zone event. Following this type of earthquake, the *Seismic Design Criteria* allowed a service level of "Possible permanent loss of service." In other words, the bridge could be so badly damaged that no vehicles, ever again, would be able to cross it. That would mean zero access for emergency vehicles. This low level of seismic performance was completely at odds with MMM's engineering advice provided *before* procurement of the bridge had been committed to by the City.

When *Focus* brought this issue to public attention in 2015, City councillors asked Huggett to explain MMM's *Seismic Design Criteria*. City staff had never told the councillors about the document's existence or its purpose. In response to the council's request for an explanation, Huggett made two presentations, one to councillors and one to media. Neither provided a single word of explanation of why the document was created, what it contained, what its provisions meant, or what impact it had on the bridge's contractually required seismic performance for emergency vehicle access or repairability. The councillors didn't notice that, amongst all the irrelevant engineerese Huggett provided, there was no explanation of the *Seismic Design Criteria* document.

What the document's inclusion in the contract means is that the City will have no legal ground to sue any of the parties involved in building the bridge if, following an earthquake, the bridge can't

THE BRIDGE'S CURRENT HYDRAULIC PROBLEMS show that Huggett's expensive advice was actually expensive nonsense. There are other, even more striking examples of Huggett's advice not serving the public interest. I think of them as Huggett's Greatest Hits.

provide immediate access to emergency vehicles, one of the primary objectives of the project.

Here's another of Huggett's Greatest Hits: In 2015 he informed City councillors that protective fendering for the north side of the bridge had not been included in the construction contract with PCL. He told councillors it had been "clouded out" in contract drawings. As a result, he told them, this fendering would add extra millions to the project cost. *Focus* filed an FOI for the "clouded out" contract drawings Huggett had referenced. The City informed us that no such drawings could be found. It was made clear by several documents that *did* exist—including the actual contract with PCL—that no exclusion of the north side fendering had been included in the agreement. Yet Huggett promoted the idea that the City would have to pay several million dollars more for physical protection on the north side of the bridge. Four years later, after numerous expensive updates on the fendering issue by Huggett, the bridge continues to be unprotected on its north side.

Another great hit: in early 2018, *Focus* published a story that revealed the bascule leaf of the bridge had undergone a major, last-minute repair after four years of fabrication in China. Large holes had to be cut into the structure's fracture-critical rings. Six-foot-by-six-foot steel plates had been crudely bolted over the holes. We sought an explanation from Huggett, who provided next to no information about who knew what, and when they knew it. Later, he complained to City council that we had claimed the plates were scrap steel. We had not.

Huggett supported the position of the company that had designed the bascule leaf, Hardesty & Hanover, which blamed the Chinese company that had fabricated the bridge for the circumstances that led to the need for the plates. But documents later obtained by *Focus* through an FOI showed that the problem that led to the bolted-on plates had been known for over a year before any attempt had been made to address it. That long interval of no action—during which the Chinese company waited for a decision from Hardesty & Hanover but also kept building on top of the problem—had necessitated the crude application of the plates.

The documents obtained by FOI also showed that the root cause of the problem was incomplete details on shop drawings, which were ultimately the responsibility of the designer, Hardesty & Hanover. The documents showed that Huggett had been kept informed of this serious problem by PCL, but that he had failed to inform any City official about the problem. The best option, from the City's perspective, would have been to reweld that section of the rings as per the intended design. But Huggett never even informed the City that the problem existed, let alone that there were options for how to fix the problem. If *Focus* hadn't raised the issue, no one at City Hall would have known why those big, bolted-on plates were there.

The visual defacement of the intended design that these plates created caught the attention of a British bridge designer, who wrote: "It's clear from the photographs that nothing this awful should be considered acceptable as part of the finished structure." As well, a steel fabrication expert told *Focus* the plates would likely lead to long-term corrosion and maintenance issues.

Records obtained from the City regarding Huggett's remuneration for professional services and expenses show that during the last half of 2014, for all of 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018, and for the first four months of 2019, he was billing the City for about $25,000 per month for professional services and expenses. In 2018 the *Times Colonist* observed that Huggett was the most highly remunerated person drawing from a municipal public purse anywhere in the CRD in 2016 ($303,087.05) and 2017 ($308,299.37).

Of Huggett's monthly billings, $20,000 was for "professional services." The balance was for expenses. Itemized breakdowns of his expenses, obtained by FOI, show that he had been billing the City about $2500 per month for a monthly pass on Air Canada to fly between Vancouver (he lives in White Rock) and Victoria.

Huggett's May 1, 2019 billing was for $22,571.20, but by June 1 that had suddenly dropped to $6,530.80. The City was finally requiring an itemized accounting of his billable hours. The latest shows that in June, 2019 he billed the City for a total of 22 hours, three of which were spent on "calls" about "hydraulic system failure."

In all, up to the time the bridge broke down, Huggett had been paid $1.407 million for his services and expenses. It's unclear whether any public accounting of bridge project costs has included that cost.

It's not easy to ascertain exactly what Huggett did for the City. That's because there's no public record of what he did and why he did it. Working from his home in White Rock, he wasn't required to use a City of Victoria email account through which his City-related emails would have—or *should* have—been recorded and archived and accessible by FOI. When we asked the City for Huggett's communications regarding the bolted-on plates, not a single email was provided that would show how Huggett had responded to communications from PCL or Hardesty & Hanover. Those emails, paid for dearly with taxpayers' dollars, are in the sole custody of Jonathan Huggett.

In the end, besides the largely boilerplate quarterly reports he provided to City councillors, he seems to have been valued at City Hall as someone who would assist them with public relations on a disastrous and embarrassing project. When *Focus* asked Mayor Helps if she had known about the bolted-on plates, she devised a non-response response and sent it to Huggett for his consideration first. (She accidentally copied us on that response when she sent it to Huggett.)

In 2017, when the City staged a public "Lessons Learned" exercise about the project, then-Councillor Pam Madoff told Huggett: "I remember very specifically having this conversation [with the bridge's designers and engineers] about the mechanics, you know, the—in simplistic terms—the cogs, the wheels, how it was going to lift. I remember at the time saying, 'Is this basically just a larger version of the Meccano sets that we played with as kids, in terms of its actual mechanical operation?' And, again, that was the assurance. To me it comes down to: how far does one have to go? We felt like we asked the right questions at the time. It turns out they may not have been the right answers."

Huggett's response to Madoff was short: "There is no question that you were not given good advice." On that point I heartily agree.

David Broadland is the publisher of *Focus Magazine*.

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Drama, passion and control at the tip of her brush

KATE CINO

Eunmi Conacher strives to communicate the feelings of a place with energetic brushstrokes and saturated colour.

Sidney by the Sea is an idyllic place on a warm summer day. Out on the Salish Sea, there are kayakers and sailboats, a glimpse of Mount Baker amid puffy white clouds, and off-shore islands. Along the seaside sculpture walk there are green parks and flower gardens. If we walk to the end of Sidney Pier, perhaps a seal will surface or an octopus slither past.

The long pier brings us to the Fish Market and Pier Bistro, popular places with locals and tourists. Visual artist Eunmi Conacher captured this vista at Sidney Pier. She worked for three hours on her *plein air* painting, sometimes with a curious passerby peering over her shoulder. Glancing back and forth, the person might have pondered the difference between the real-life scene and the one unfolding on the easel. This is because imagination rules in Conacher's 16-by-10-inch, acrylic-on-paper artwork.

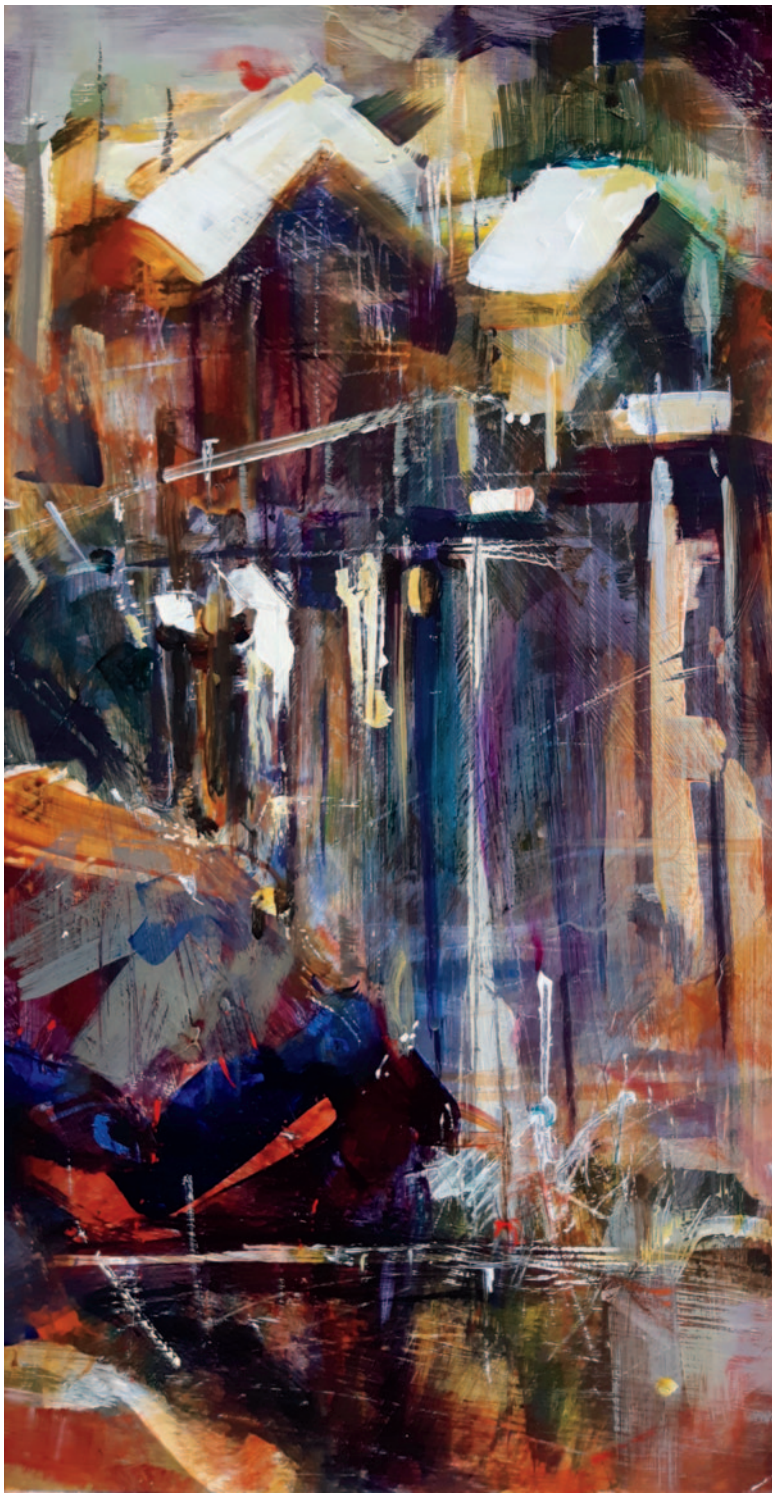
It's an expressionistic interpretation of Sidney Pier. The composition dances with abstracted shapes and explosive splashes of colour. Loose liquid brushstrokes combine with dry sketchy areas, applied with skill and confidence. The market and bistro buildings are loosely sketched, defined mainly by stark white angular roofs. Thin white lines hint at rickety railings. Tilted upwards and foreshortened, the pier lies parallel to the picture plane. The tilted pier is represented by vertical bands of colour that plunge down like a cascading waterfall. These riotous bands of aqua-blue and green are interwoven with crimson, orange and blue-gray. Saturated colours of red, blue, purple and orange pile one atop the other in a shape at bottom left. A low horizon line suggests a watery pool with white splashes of water.

I query Eunmi Conacher about the magical transformations in her piece. Why does she do it? "Because I love to paint!" she says. "I'm energized by the vibrant colours and flowing brushwork as I work." Conacher creates imaginary landscapes that people can interpret and enjoy. It's important to her that the feeling of the place is communicated, moreso than the physical reality. She strives to make a painting from the heart that resonates with viewers.

How does she do it? "My use of colour, form and texture is intuitive," says Conacher. The artist works with colour values (the light and dark of tones) to define areas of positive and negative space, and add a sense of depth. Her under-paintings are washes of acrylic with predominantly warm tones. On this ground, she sketches out the major shapes with pencil or charcoal. In Sidney Pier, for example, she made the roofs a focal point, suggesting the dazzle of bright sunlight with white paint.

At first, she paints quickly, with spontaneous pleasure. When the painting is about one-third completed, she takes a more analytical approach, checking shapes and colours, and making changes. Tweaks continue to happen, until she decides a painting is finished. "A successful composition has no sags or lags," she says. There should be movement, an emotional charge, and room for the viewers' imagination to roam freely.

Conacher, along with other skilled and accomplished West Coast artists, will be exhibiting works at the Avenue Gallery October 17-27, 2019. The group show is called "Our Coast" and features Gaye



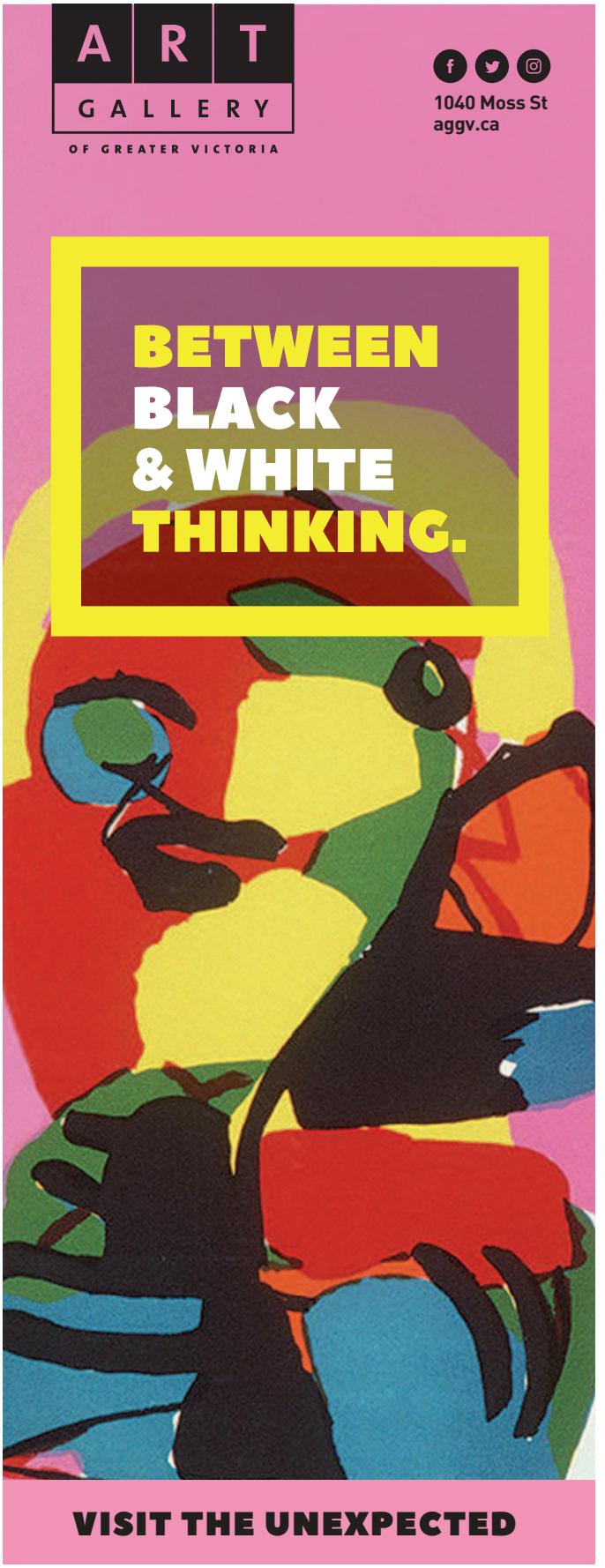
"Sidney Pier" 16 x 10 inches, acrylic on paper

Eunmi Conacher with "The Westerlies" 60 x 20 inches, acrylic on panel

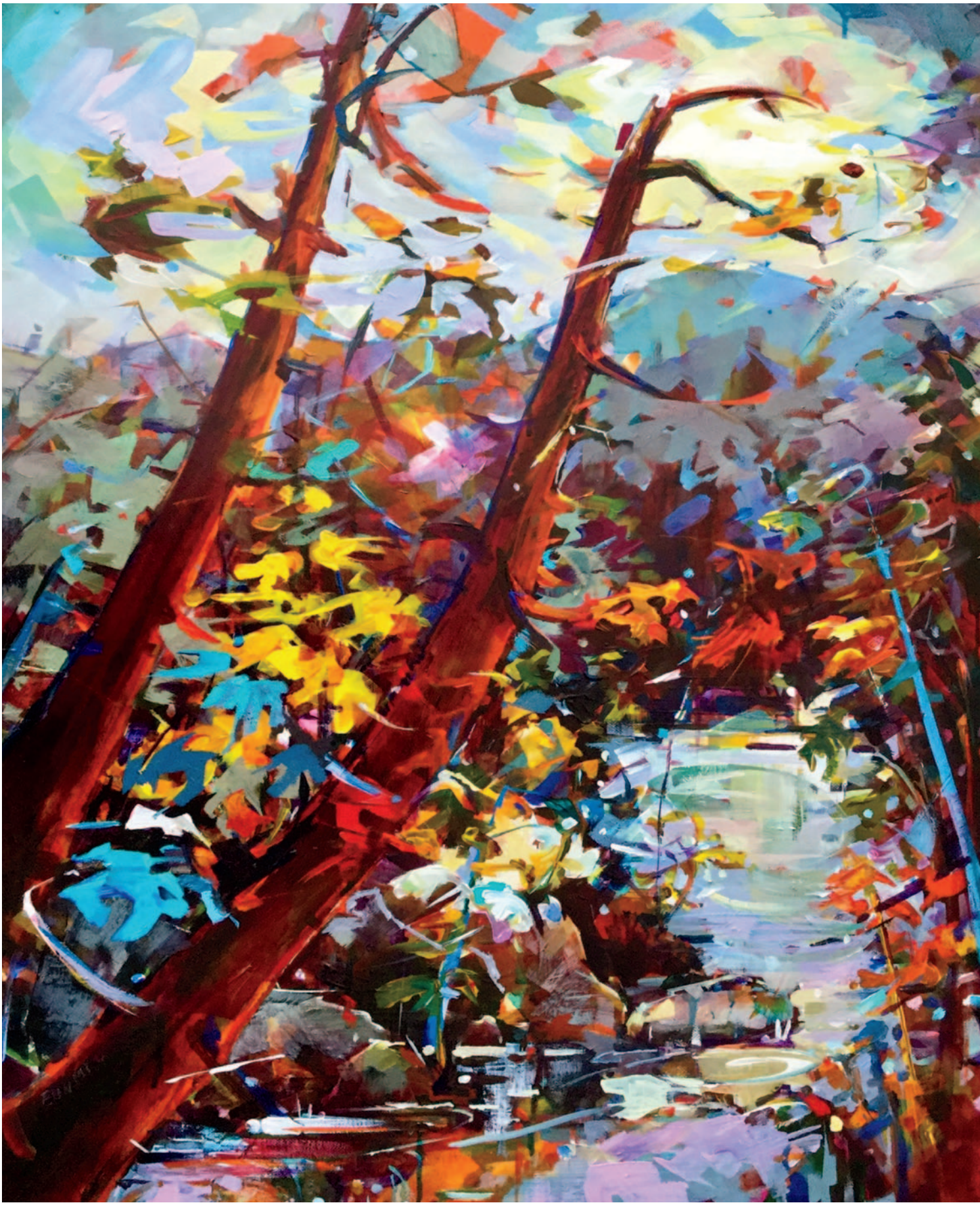
Adams, Mary-Jean Butler, Susie Cipolla, Lorna Dockstader, Rob Elphinstone, Maria Josenhans, Brent Lynch and Philip Mix.

Gallery owner Heather Wheeler describes these coastal paintings as having "illuminated skies, fog-bound coves, and sun-dappled forests." Conacher really appreciates the chance to show with other artists from the area. She was thrilled two years ago when Avenue Gallery invited her to join their talented team of contemporary fine artists. "Now my artwork is seen by many people," she says, "and selling a painting makes everyone happy."

Conacher was born in Seoul, Korea, the youngest of four children. At the time, it was unusual for females to attend university and study abroad. Fortunately, her parents supported her artistic inclinations, and she graduated in Seoul with a Batchelor of Fine Arts degree. Moving to Australia, she attended the University of Sydney, earning a post-graduate Diploma in Visual Arts. More studies followed, during a



From the AGGV Collection: Karel Appel, Au Printemps, lithograph, ink, 49.5 x 62.5 cm, Women's Committee Cultural Fund, 1971.113.001.



Left: "November on the Coast" 30 x 24 inches, acrylic on canvas

ceramics research program at Tsukuba University in Japan. The adventurous woman has travelled widely, savouring cities around the globe with her atmospheric "Cityscapes" series.

Conacher emigrated to Canada in 1996. She and her partner married in Whistler, and the couple moved to Nanaimo in 2004, then to Sooke in 2016. She became an active member of the Federation of Canadian Artists in 2008, and an associate in 2015. She became an elected member of The Society of Canadian Artists in 2013.

While in Nanaimo, Conacher began taking classes at the Old Schoolhouse Arts Centre in Qualicum Beach. Former executive director of the Arts Centre, Corinne James, took note of her promising student. "Eunmi is a very hard worker," she says, "and I noticed her skills and determination right away." During her 21-year career, James helped develop the Arts Centre into a vibrant exhibition and teaching space for artists and musicians, retiring in May 2019. She gave Conacher her first solo show within a year, and several more followed. In 2018, a painting by Conacher took second place in a national juried show at the Arts Centre.

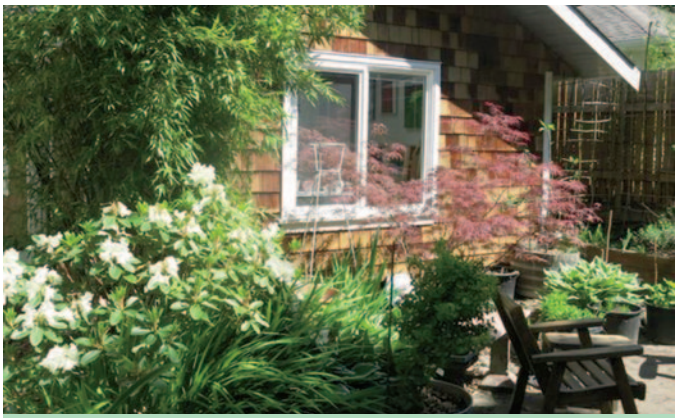
James praises Conacher's fresh approach to painting West Coast scenery, using a vibrant palette and impressionistic style. "Her colours evoke a mood," says James; "she paints a familiar scene from a fresh perspective." For example, in "Whispering Wind," the artist captures the awe-inspiring scale of our landscapes, within a three-by-three-foot canvas. There are towering mountains in the distance, a rocky shore line, and tall trees swaying in the breeze. The lively brushwork creates movement in the turbulent sky and wind-blown trees. "The viewer is reminded of a time and place when they felt connected to nature," says James, who praises the quality and variety of Conacher's mark-making and brushwork, noting that the artist has worked hard to hone her skills and develop her strengths and now produces paintings of consistent quality. "Many artists hope for happy accidents to produce special pieces," says James, "but Eunmi has total control, and knows exactly what she is doing."

Conacher is happy to pass on her skills, and offers sold-out workshops several times a year. Her 2019 weekend workshop at Metchosin summer school (MISSA) was titled "Letting it Go! Abstract Painting." Helping artists find and express their unique voice and vision is her mission. She hopes to teach at Coast Collective this fall and winter.

Her painting "First Glance" received top honours at the 2019 juried "Love Divine" show, co-sponsored by Coast Collective and the West Shore Arts Council. This loosely-painted figural painting of a dancing couple conveys a moment of powerful emotion. Dramatic shifts of dark to light, a lively swirl of brushwork, and saturated colours bring the passionate scene to life. Life, with all its emotional overtones and myriad experiences, continues to intrigue and inspire the brushwork of Eunmi Conacher.

See paintings by Eunmi Conacher and other West Coast artists in the exhibit "Our Coast" at Avenue Gallery, October 17-27, 2019, 2184 Oak Bay Avenue, 250-598-2184, www.theavenuegallery.com.

Kate Cino holds a History of Art degree from the University of Victoria. Her writing about the arts can also be found at www.artopenings.ca.



Victoria Studio Residency

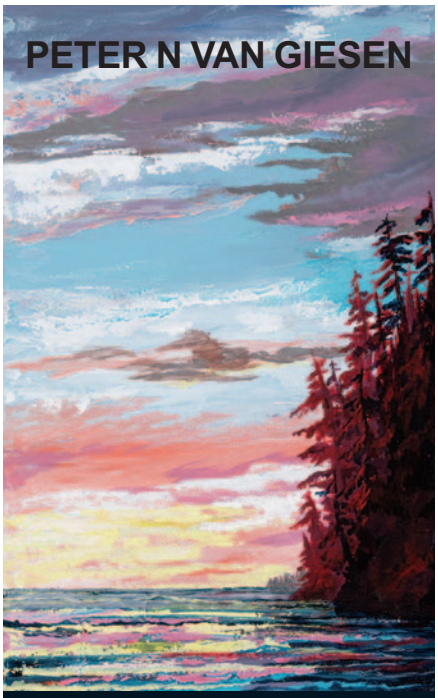
Application deadline for 2020 residencies is Sept 15

The BMK Studio Residency was established in 2016 by the Kreye family in memory of Bonnie McComb Kreye, artist and educator. Each year, up to 7 local and international artists are selected to work in the garden studio. In May and June, accommodation is provided on site. Self-funded and focussed on supporting the artist's creative process, the BMKResidency has partnered with the Vancouver Island School of Art and is supported by the Victoria Arts Council Gallery, Fifty-Fifty Arts Collective and the Ministry of Casual Living.

For more information:

bonniemccombkreye.com/about-residency

bmkresidency@gmail.com



peternvangiesen.com
peter@peternvangiesen.com
Central Art Studio & Gallery at The Bay Centre
www.centralartstudiogallery.com

FREEFALL

September 17 to October 5, 2019
Opening reception Sunday, September 22, 1–4 pm
Special Sunday Opening September 29, 1–4 pm

GAGE GALLERY
ARTS COLLECTIVE
2031 Oak Bay Avenue www.gagegallery.ca

AGGV House Tour • September 22

1648 Rockland

How better to spend a Sunday in September than wandering the Fairfield and Oak Bay neighbourhoods to peek into beautiful art-filled houses? This year's House Tour is, as usual, an important fundraiser for the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. Presented by the gallery and its volunteer Gallery Associates for 66 years, Bev Kallstrom, House Tour 2019 co-chair, says, "Once again, we are fortunate to have homeowners willing to open their wonderful homes to the public. The distinctive architecture and the exquisite variety of art ensure that visitors will enjoy a fabulous event."

For the first time, the tour includes Government House, the extraordinary home of BC's Lieutenant Governor, The Honourable Janet Austin OBC, and the ceremonial home of all British Columbians.

Four other outstanding properties—all in Fairfield and Oak Bay—are included on the self-guided tour which runs from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Besides their close proximity to one another, this year's featured homes share "impeccably curated art collections," often involving local artists. The diverse collections include work by Pat Martin Bates, Luke Marston, Nita Forest, Karl Spreitz and Louise Bourgeois.

Visitors will have the opportunity to chat with local artists working at each location, including six artists who will be working at Government House: Arthur Vickers, Deon Venter, Kathy Venter, Robert Amos, Lou-ann Neel and Judy McLean. Artists also featured at tour homes include: Kylee Turunen, Nancy Ruhl, Taryn Brown and Maryan Meek. Each stop on the tour also features imaginative floral creations from members of the Victoria Floral Artists' Guild.

Co-chair Bill Huzar says, "This year the funds raised from the tour will support Gallery exhibitions and educational programming for families and children."

Tickets for the self-directed tour cost $35 and are available at the AGGV, 1040 Moss Street and online at aggv.ca/house-tour or at GardenWorks (Oak Bay, Saanich, and Colwood), DigThis (Broadmead Plaza, Sidney), Munro's Books and Ivy's Bookshop. aggv.ca, 250-384-4171.

1370 Dallas

Island Artisans Art "Fall" ness • October 25-27

The Island Artisans Association (IAA) was formed 17 years ago to create opportunities for Victoria's finest artisans working in fibre, ceramics, polymer clay, up-cycled materials, jewellery, wearable art, wood, and glass. For over a decade, IAA was the organizing group of a Christmas event (Gifts for Myself and Others) at the DaVinci Centre in Esquimalt. Now, it is launching a brand-new show, Art "Fall" ness, at the Oak Bay Beach Hotel, in the hopes of garnering international exposure.

Glass bowls by Jo Ludwig, one of this year's artists at Art "Fall" ness

Linda Rajotte, IAA's executive member and organizer, says the elaborate jurying process for the event guarantees an exceptional level of quality and creativity in the offerings. There's already been two jury processes, overseen by event coordinator Lisa Samphire. Rajotte says of Samphire, "She's a talented glass artist who knows art very well; she used to manage the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria's gift shop, so she is really familiar with artisans, and used to be part-owner of Starfish Gallery downtown [now UVic's Legacy Gallery]." The plan for the exhibition portion of the offerings, Rajotte says, is to make it "similar to the amazing Sooke Fine Arts Show and the Sidney Fine Arts Show. We're hoping to see some pretty lovely pieces in there."

Rajotte explains, "There will be 23 artisans at tables in the David Foster Theatre of the hotel, where you can meet them and purchase a selection of their works; a small gift shop showcasing artisans' work in the Conservatory, and an exhibition in the Conservatory as well." The artisans are excited about utilizing the Oak Bay Beach Hotel, says Rajotte. Besides the beautiful rooms, the hotel will provide international exposure.

The opening reception on Friday, October 25 from 6:30-9pm features a cash bar, with hors d'oeuvres. Rajotte says, "We're giving away free food, and it's a free show! We're doing that because we value people who enjoy art and fine craft, and we hope they will come and eat and see the fine art—and possibly purchase."

Island Artisans Association presents Art "Fall" ness at the Oak Bay Beach Hotel, 1175 Beach Drive, October 25–27. see www.islandartisans.ca for details.

—Mollie Kaye

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"SEA WOLF" COLLABORATION BETWEEN DOUGLAS FISHER AND JEREMY HUMPHERVILLE, YELLOW CEDAR BURL

Throughout September/October

DOUGLAS FISHER AND JEREMY HUMPHERVILLE

Peninsula Gallery

Since 2005, Douglas J Fisher and Jeremy Humpherville have collaborated on over 100 sculptures. With their combined artistic vision, followed by superb craftsmanship, they have been creating some of the most thought-provoking, powerful and inspiring works of their careers. Fisher has been hand-carving since 1992. Humpherville, an aboriginal artist born and raised on Haida Gwaii, inherited his artistic talents through several generations of his father's family, and has been drawing since age two. 2506 Beacon Ave, Sidney, 250-655-1722, www.pengal.com.

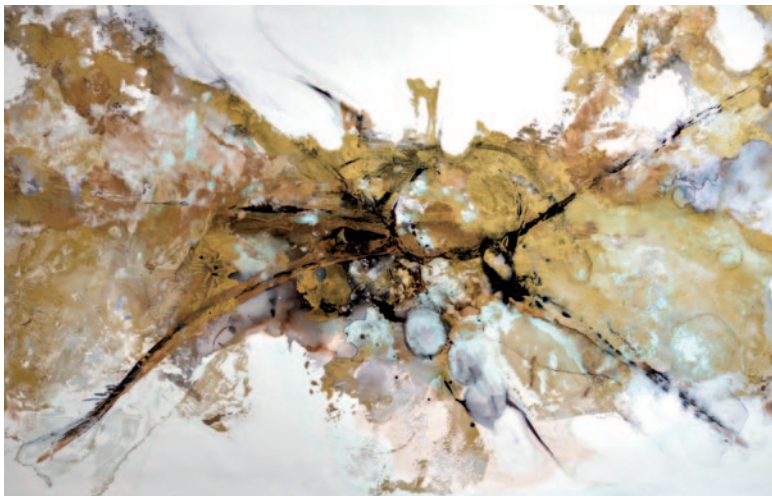
"THE SOMERSET ZODIAC" KATHARINE MALTWOOD, PAINTED WOOD BAS-RELIEF SCULPTURE, C. 1930-1940

September 19–January 12, 2020

OBJECT BIOGRAPHIES: ARTISTS' LIVES THROUGH THEIR ARCHIVES

Legacy Maltwood Gallery, UVic campus

A printing block. Glaze samples. Pouches of pigments. What can they tell us about the lives, relationships, artworks and practices of the artists who owned them? Bringing together materials from UVic's Special Collections and University Archives in partnership with the Legacy Art Galleries, Object Biographies is a glimpse into the lives of artists. Curated by Bradley Clements with Caroline Riedel. Opening reception Sept 26, 4:30-6:30 lower level, Mearns Centre for Learning, McPherson Library, RSVP to libraryevents@uvic.ca. 250-721-6562.



"DEEP" (DETAIL) SANDRA FROHER, 24 X 48 INCHES, INK, ALCOHOL ON YUPO PAPER

September 30–October 27

TWO ARTISTS WITH A COLLABORATIVE SPIRIT

Gallery at Mattick' s Farm

In this exhibit, Sandra Froher and Allison Brodie will show one piece of collaborative art, but the whole show is a collaboration. The artists state that a collaboration is the ultimate test of placing your ego aside; there is no room for hierarchy, just trust and mutual respect for each other's process. Froher's work (shown here) is heavily influenced by the unknown celestial world and the unseen waters of the ocean. Opening reception Oct 5, 1-4pm. 109-5325 Cordova Bay, 250-658-8333, thegalleryatmatticksfarm.com.

"HIT & SUNK" AMBER LOMAX, 36 X 36 INCHES, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

October 4–20

AMBER LOMAX: HIT AND SUNK

Xchanges Gallery

In a series of otherworldly paintings, Lomax explores our connection to our subconscious side and the internal struggle between who we are and who we think we are. Lomax was recently selected by the City of Victoria to participate in a project that brings emerging artists and public art together. An image of her painting "The Call" was displayed at a Downtown bus shelter for four months. Opening reception Oct 4, 7-9pm. Otherwise, Sat & Sun 11am-4pm. 6E-2333 Government St, 250-382-0442, xchangesgallery.org.

Robert Savignac

L'Auberge de la Place 36x30" Oil on Canvas by Robert Savignac

An Exhibition of New Paintings
September 14 - 26, 2019

west end gallery
1203 Broad Street | 250.388.0009
www.westendgalleryltd.com | Open Daily

THE AVENUE GALLERY

Come Out, Come Out Wherever You Are, Everyone Wants to be a Star oil on canvas 40 x 40

Kimberly Kiel: Mark Making
September 19 – 29

2184 OAK BAY AVENUE VICTORIA
www.theavenuegallery.com 250-598-2184

LYNDA GAMMON

STUDIO PRACTICE:
MEDITATION PRACTICE

VICTORIA ARTS COUNCIL

1800 STORE STREET

19 SEPTEMBER-27 OCTOBER 2019

TUESDAY - SATURDAY 12:00PM-5:00PM

www.vicartscouncil.ca

MADRONA GALLERY

Islands in the Sky, 30 x 40 inches, Acrylic on Canvas

RICK BOND

SEPT 21 - OCT 5 2019

OPENING RECEPTION: SEPT 21, 1 - 4 PM

606 View St • www.madronagallery.com • 250.380.4660

M. HEINE

"ENCOUNTER" MARK HEINE, 36 X 48 INCHES, OIL ON CANVAS

Throughout September/October

MARK HEINE

Peninsula Gallery

Victoria artist and author Mark Heine is the first Canadian to win the prestigious Haynes Galleries Award at the 14th International ARC Salon, the largest competition for contemporary realism in the world. Heine's painting "Labyrinth" was one of nine selected from 4,300 entries from 73 countries around the world. His painting will be shown in Spain, and at Sotheby's in New York.

Mark Heine was raised by artists to be an artist. During his childhood, there was always a diverse selection of skills in action to watch and learn from: sculptors, designers, architects, and artisans, working in plaster, resin, concrete, fibreglass, wood, stained glass, tapestry, and, of course, paint. Heine's late father, Harry Heine (1928-2004), a renowned Victoria marine painter, would eventually become one of Canada's most celebrated artists. Both of Mark's two sisters, Caren and Jennifer, are also accomplished professional artists.

In the pursuit of his original artistic voice, Heine's writing has evolved to become the driving force behind his work. It led him to envision a world of his own creation. His series *Sirens*, the culmination of 35 years' exploration, is inspired by the sea-nymphs, made famous in Homer's Odyssey. These underwater visions of mythological muse are rooted in the moments of an ongoing and developing fictional narrative. This complex narrative, involving human evolution and our natural environment, is the unifying conceptual thread that ties these surreal visions.

For the painting shown here, Heine describes the story point: "Her veil of darkness has vanished with the dawn. Sarah strains to swim as fast as possible, fighting against exhaustion. Her destination is close, but so are those in pursuit."

Each of the paintings in the series is a captured moment in *Sirens*, a book of magical realism. Says Heine, "It's objective is to examine humankind's ambiguous, destructive and undefined relationship with the natural world—my purpose being to inspire reflection and perhaps affect attitudes…"

His art can be seen at the Peninsula Gallery, 2506 Beacon Ave, Sidney, 250-655-1722, www.pengal.com. Also see www.markheine.com.

THE AVENUE GALLERY

OUR COAST | OCT 17 - 27

GAYE ADAMS, MARY-JEAN BUTLER, SUSIE CIPOLLA, EUNMI CONACHER
LORNA DOCKSTADER, ROB ELPHINSTONE, MARIA JOSENHANS, BRENT LYNCH, PHILIP MIX

2184 OAK BAY AVENUE VICTORIA
www.theavenuegallery.com 250-598-2184

Spot On!

Peter Flanagan & Roberta Pyx Sutherland
Fortune Gallery 537 Fisgard St. Victoria B.C.
October 24 - November 17 2019
Opening Reception Thursday, October 24 5:00 - 9:00 pm
OkanaganPottery.com RobertaPyxSutherland.com FortuneGallery.ca

"CREATING NEW PATHS" ANNABELLE MARQUI, 36 X 48 INCHES, MIXED MEDIA ON CANVAS

Throughout September/October

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS IN VICTORIA

West End Gallery

This fall, West End Gallery proudly celebrates its 25th Anniversary in Victoria. The gallery's mandate is to provide an exceptional selection of Canadian painters and glass artists to its clients and collectors. "We are thrilled to be a part of the Victoria community and would like to thank our local, Canadian, and international clients, along with our family of artists, for your ongoing support; we are truly grateful," say owners Lana and Dan Hudon. 1203 Broad St, 250-388-0009, www.westendgallery.com.

"PLAYIN' IT SO COOL" (DETAIL) KIMBERLY KIEL, 24 X 18 INCHES, OIL ON CANVAS

September 19–29

KIMBERLY KIEL: MARK MAKING

The Avenue Gallery

Kimberly Kiel expresses herself through a wide variety of subject matter: landscapes and treescapes; figure pieces and florals. She loves the creaminess of oil, the opportunity to blend, the fact that it doesn't dry too quickly. Looking at her work, it's obvious that colour is a major source of inspiration. She greatly enjoys playing around with the surface on the canvas, getting different layers and textures. 2184 Oak Bay Ave, 250-598-2184, www.theavenuegallery.com.

"ISLANDS IN THE SKY" RICK BOND, 40 X 60 INCHES, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

September 21–October 5

RICK BOND

Madrona Gallery

BC artist Rick Bond presents a new collection of vibrant and expressive paintings. For the past 30 years, he has been exploring the West Coast while taking notes and making sketches along the way. During this time, Bond has successfully created a new and unique lens through which to view the West Coast. In 1999, Rick achieved AFCA Signature Status with the Federation of Canadian Artists. His work is collected internationally. Opening reception Sept 21, 1-4 pm. 606 View St, 250-380-4660, www.madronalgallery.com.

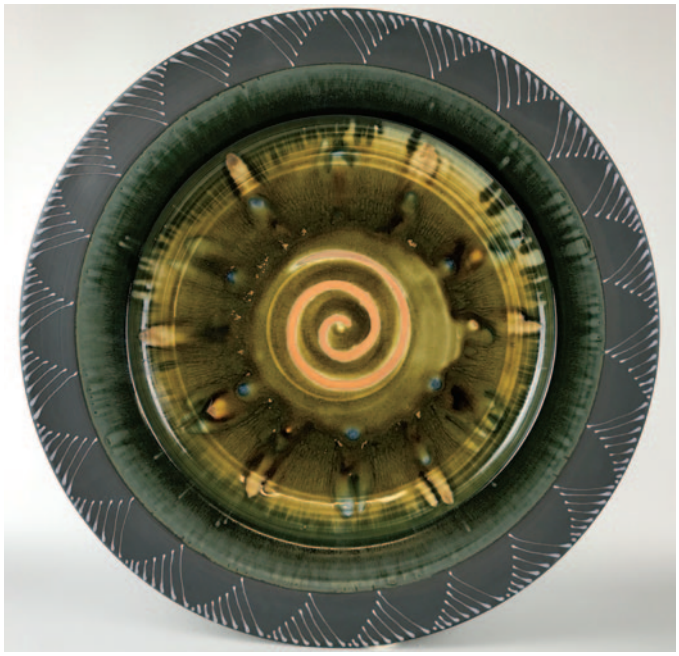
CERAMIC VESSEL BY PETER FLANAGAN, BLACK PORCELAIN, SLIPPED RIMGLAZE TRAILED, POURED & BRUSHED DECORATION

October 24–November 17

SPOT ON: PETER FLANAGAN & ROBERTA PYX SUTHERLAND

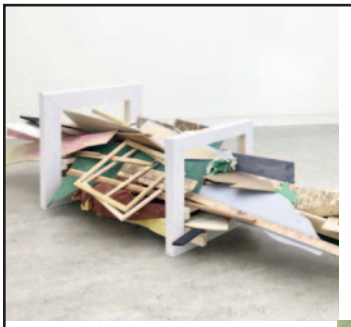
Fortune Gallery

The circle is a symbol of completion, perfection and the inclusivity of the universe. Ceramic artist Peter Flanagan and painter Roberta Pyx Sutherland explore these meanings through the joyous repetition of the concentric circular form. Flanagan says, "Early Asian ceramic glaze origins inform my exploration of wild BC clays combined with wood ash." Sutherland is inspired by the relationships of cosmic patterning and divine intelligence. Opening reception Oct 24, 5-9pm. 537 Fisgard St. RobertaPyxSutherland.com; OkanaganPottery.com; FortuneGallery.ca.



PENINSULA Gallery
Fine Art Since 1986

"Family Stories"
by Carol Gold
9.5 x 12 x 5.5 inches, bronze
2506 Beacon Ave, Sidney • 250.655.1722 • www.pengal.com



September 6-22
Austin Willis
"Curious Constructions"
Opening reception:
Friday Sept 6, 7-9pm

October 4-20
Amber Lomax
"Hit and Sunk"
Opening reception:
Friday Oct 4, 7-9pm

Xchanges Gallery
2333 Government Street
250.382.0442
www.xchangesgallery.org
Open Saturdays & Sundays, 11-4

Xchanges Gallery gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the CRD

ALICE PAUL, 1975, PHOTOGRAPH BY ULLI STELTZER. IMAGE COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA LEGACY ART GALLERIES

September 28–December 21

WE CARRY OUR ANCESTORS: CEDAR, BASKETS AND OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE LAND

Legacy Downtown

This exhibition weaves together generations of Indigenous women through cedar basketry. For the first time ever, Legacy Art Galleries will exhibit Nuu-chah-nulth and Salish historical baskets from the collection, alongside portraits of the weavers including Alice Paul, Rosie Ross, Mary Jane Jackson, Mathilda Jim, Julianna Williams, Liz Happynook, Lena Jumbo and Ellen Jumbo. The photographic portraits are by documentary photographer Ulli Steltzer from Germany, who lived in Vancouver from 1972 until her death in 2018 at age 94. She used an unobtrusive hand-held Rolleiflex camera while photographing many First Nations artists at their work in BC.

Contemporary baskets by Salish artists Angela Marston and Brenda Crabtree, among others, will also be exhibited. Through new and intensive community research, this exhibition honours the resilience of women who have carried their cultures forward by passing down the art of cedar basketry to future generations. The exhibit is curated by Lorilee Wastasecoot, BC Arts Council Curatorial Intern.

Opening Celebration: Saturday, September 28, 3-5pm. Legacy Downtown, 630 Yates St, Lekwungen territory, www.legacy.uvic.ca, 250-721-6562.

Wentworth Villa Music Series • Starting September 8

I'd heard rumours about a new museum of architectural history on Fort Street, but I'd never been inside it until I investigated Wentworth Villa's fourth-annual music series, curated by artistic director Sarah Fryer. "The museum is still establishing itself," she explains. The Villa, which in 1863 was one of the first homes built in the young city, has recently appointed a director to help them develop more exhibits highlighting the significant architecture of Victoria and early life of English settlers in the post-Fort-Victoria era.

As soon as the exhaustive and beautiful renovation of the heritage building was completed a few years ago, Wentworth Villa developed a music series to invite the public in to enjoy the space and connect to the meticulously restored property.

Fryer, herself an opera singer, has a long history in the music business, with connections to wonderful performers and artists in various parts of the world. The intimate series of concerts in the charming 108-seat cathedral-ceiling performance space (added in the 1950s), "brings in people who otherwise might not have a chance to perform in Victoria."

"The acoustics are excellent for chamber music," she enthuses. "The audience sits quite close, and the chairs are comfortable. Everyone in the room has a good view of what's going on; people who like to see what a keyboard player is doing can sit behind them and look at their hands." Pianist Irwin Shung performs on September 8, playing Bach's Golberg Variations. On September 29, The Vetta Quartet will perform Beethoven's String Quartet No. 4 in C minor, and selections from Shostakovich and Tchaikovsky. November 2 and 3 the Villa welcomes tenor Isaiah Bell and collaborative pianist Anna Cal, performing Schubert's powerful, 1828 song cycle. All concerts end with a Q&A session with the artists. In all there are seven concerts in the season, which runs through May 2020.

The Vetta Quartet, September 29

Wentworth Villa is open to the public every Thursday-Saturday, 11-4, and guide Michael Opalski is delighted to tour visitors through the Villa's fascinating details and archival collections. "The goal is to slowly build awareness for the museum…[this] comes from the music program, rather than architectural angle; it's a tough battle to get ourselves more known locally," he says. After enjoying my tour, I can say the Villa is definitely worth a visit—with or without music.

Wentworth Villa Architecture Heritage Museum is at 1156 Fort St. 7-concert pass is $240 ($150 students), or $40 per concert ($25 students). Call 250-598-0760 or see wentworthvilla.com for more information. *—Mollie Kaye*

James and his giant peach add sparkle to Victoria

MOLLIE KAYE

Jimbo Insell is grateful for everything, especially his creative life.

"Well, maybe it started that way. As a dream, but doesn't everything… Somebody had to dream about it first. And maybe that is what I did. I dreamed about coming here, but then I did it."

—*Roald Dahl, James and the Giant Peach*

I peer in through the dusty glass of an ancient Chinatown door as Fisgard Street and its red silk lanterns darken against a dusky summer sky. A faint glow at the top of narrow wooden stairs eerily illuminates about 20 mannequin torsos ascending the treads like a faceless, legless chorus rehearsing an Ann Miller production number. I ring James Insell's bell again. No answer. A few seconds later, he arrives, with a smile and apologies, from his work managing costume design on a film set. "Jimbo," as he calls himself, is not yet a household name in Victoria, but he's arguably got one of the city's most exciting and original creative minds.

I've seen his ironic, creepy costumed characters' improvisational interactions with an audience. The nightmarish qualities of his provocative "clown" spectres with their white-faced, baloney-and-hot-dog hijinks leave some in stitches, some moved to tears, and others sprinting for the doors.

"Edgy" artists don't typically exude the enormous warmth, goodwill and generosity that Insell does, yet my late-night conversation with this wildly innovative designer, drag queen and clown, in his Willy-Wonka-wonderland of a 3,000-square-foot studio (imagine Royal BC Museum's "Old Town" made over by Pee-wee Herman and RuPaul) reveals a wise and compassionate man, whose creative body of work is all in the service of supporting authentic emotional experience.

Insell's authenticity has truly been hard won. As young children in London, Ontario, he and his brother Jeff (now an actor based in Toronto) secretly dressed in women's clothes and danced around in their basement, but their father, a successful doctor and scientist, sternly forbid such behaviour. "He didn't want his sons to be faggots," Insell relates. Anything that telegraphed as gay "was seen by my dad as totally bad and wrong."

Despite yearning for the arts, an obedient and admiring Insell dutifully acquiesced to his commandeering father's demands that

James Insell

he study science, earning a BSc in biology from the University of Western Ontario and garnering opportunities abroad with the University of Stockholm and Cambridge University. One of the most profound and transformative experiences of his life, he says, was in a Kenyan forest, communicating with chimpanzees in sign language. Yet he didn't attend his graduation in 2008, never picked up his diploma, and hasn't applied his degree to any endeavour since. With a gentle straightforwardness, Insell says of his upbringing, "I fully moved on with my life…I've seen how you can live in a really sick and miserable way…so I try to cultivate and create a positive, joyful and creative life."

He packed up and moved west to Victoria, throwing himself into the creative collaborations and community he'd craved since childhood. He's designed (and sewed) hundreds of costumes for local independent theatre productions, and his stage appearances are "all about what is truthfully happening in the moment…Things you don't anticipate become gifts. If you're truly present and listening, you can use everything…The clown is a conduit for emotion and experience and feeling; it sort of plays in those feelings without deep consequence."

And why lunchmeat as a prop? "I ate so much baloney growing up—my dad ate that loaf that had macaroni in it," Insell says with a laugh. "It never felt like actual food to me… there's all kinds of things you can do with it; it's funny and weird."

As much as he still enjoys performing drag or clown occasionally, it's behind-the-scenes design work that constitutes the bulk of Insell's creative efforts. At 36, after a decade of proving his resourceful brilliance on shoestring budgets, he is now thriving in a successful career as a costume designer in Victoria's burgeoning commercial film industry, while continuing to work his magic in the local independent theatre scene (see costumes and sets for Atomic Vaudeville's annual October staging of "The Rocky Horror Picture Show.")

Resolutely geared toward achievement, with an iron-clad work ethic, Insell keeps the triumph-to-tragedy ratio solidly in his favour by focusing on gratitude. "It's amazing what having good energy and putting good energy into the world can bring to you," the tall, lanky artist quietly asserts, a rainbow of coloured lights flashing in sequence above him, reflecting off scores of disco balls and silver stars hanging from the ceiling. A tribe of mannequins surround us and hundreds of colourful toys float on shelves. "Positive energy and intentions just breed more positive energy and intention in the world…I think that comes from just trying to be aware of what's happening, and to be grateful." Insell credits his mother with helping him cultivate this outlook. "She taught me to envision things and be grateful. We talked a lot about dreams: what my dreams were, how to achieve my dreams."

Insell arrived in Victoria with his BSc in biology, but no formal training in design. He eagerly took on large-scale theatre projects that required outrageous physical self-sacrifice and paid him a pittance, but what he got were excellent learning opportunities, the gratification of contributing to successful productions, and the freedom of creative expression. By choosing work carefully, he was able to methodically refine his skills as an independent designer for Blue Bridge, Theatre Skam, and

Atomic Vaudeville (his first design project was "Ride the Cyclone," which launched the successful careers of several locals).

"There was not a lot of money in it for me personally, but it was all part of my journey to get where I am." For this pent-up, long-denied theatre kid, being an integral part of a creative team and getting to see the audience experience the sets and costumes he'd designed "became a form of payment." Insell then deftly positioned himself to get hired into the film industry, right as local movie and TV series production began its renaissance. Right now, he's working as costume designer for a three-part series of feature-length mysteries (working title: *Martha Vineyard Mysteries*) for the Hallmark Channel with Front Street Pictures, a Vancouver-based production company. He marvels at how his working life has transformed, with international audiences of millions viewing his work on The Hallmark Channel.

Insell's favourite book from childhood features a boy who, like him, is named James. James undertakes an epic journey to escape the cruel tragedy of his family circumstances, faces unexpected challenges and, ultimately, enjoys the wonderful life he's dreamed of. Insell shows me photos and the maquette of his ingenious designs for Kaleidoscope Theatre's staging of *James and the Giant Peach*—including the insect costumes and mammoth-fruit centrepiece. He animatedly recounts the press calling to ask about it. "'Hullo, James? This is the *Times Colonist*. We hear you've got a giant peach!' I was like, 'Oh my fucking God, do you know this is *exactly* what happens in the story?'" The full-circle metaphorical significance of that moment still inspires awe in him. His eyes are alive with joy and wonder as he shakes his head. "I guess life imitates art."

Jimbo Insell's costume and set designs are featured in Atomic Vaudeville's October production of "The Rocky Horror Picture show." See http://atomicvaudeville.wixsite.com. See jimbo.online for a couple of videos and many photos of his work.

Mollie Kaye's year-long social experiment, "Turned-out Tuesdays," aims to assuage the epidemic of social isolation by promoting the mental-health-boosting powers of talking to strangers. (facebook and instagram "Turned-out Tuesdays" as well as www.theyearofdressup.com.

"OH, I COULD NEVER SAY" MEGAN DIETRICH, 24 X 24 INCHES, MIXED MEDIA ON CANVAS

October 11–October 25

MEGAN DIETRICH: ANALOG US

Madrona Gallery

Megan Dietrich is a Vancouver-based artist whose expressive paintings examine relationships of line, colour, and texture through influences of modern art history, pop culture, and personal experiences of life on the West Coast. Megan grew up in Powell River, and much of her painting and material language comes from that experience—surrounded by community, nature and a multitude of rich organic elements. There is always a fluidity to her work; room for mixture, variation and expression. She uses acrylic paint, pencil, ink, charcoal and other media to produce emotional and introspective mark-making that carries the eye. After a brief stint in studio art training, Megan finished her degree at the University of Victoria in 2012 and worked in a number of creative industries including film/television, art education and graphic design.

This will be her first solo exhibition with Madrona Gallery and will feature over 20 new works. Analog Us is an attempt to be fully human, focusing on colour, sensory texture, and composition. The works explore connections between mental wellness, creativity, and the environment. Opening reception Oct 11, 7-9 pm. 606 View St, 250-380-4660, www.madronagallery.com.

Cherish: Dance, Fashion & Philanthropy • October 24

If "Cherish," Dance Victoria's annual fundraiser, were a young ballet student, it has now gotten up *en pointe*. After launching in 2015 at the studios on Quadra Street, which seat about 100, this year's event will be Downtown at the historic Crystal Garden. Built in 1925, it seats 400 and offers much more space and accessibility, something all dancers—and dance supporters—can appreciate.

The Crystal Garden is this year's venue for Cherish

The entertainment at Cherish showcases both fashion and dance, with a team of local performers moving and grooving down the runway (choreography by Victoria's own Lynda Raino) while modelling clothing from local retailers (this year's lineup features Tulipe Noir Clothing, Hughes Clothing, and Outlooks for Men). There are light appetizers, a silent and live auction, and a complimentary beverage for each guest.

That first year of "Cherish," Dance Victoria's staff of four (plus volunteers) were run off their feet, handling myriad details for *two* annual fundraisers—spring and fall. Bernard Sauvé, DV's general manager, says, "It was a lot of work. We decided to do one event a year, and really concentrate on that event." Further post-mortem discussions among DV staff yielded exciting partnership ideas. "We think this event is really fantastic because it combines Women's Transition House, a social cause, and Dance Victoria, an art cause," Sauvé enthuses. "We know the arts make people feel better in general, and Women's Transition House is helping the public with social issues."

Cherish has sought out venues with greater and greater capacity, moving from DV's studios to the Oak Bay Beach Hotel, then the Fairmont. And now the Crystal Garden, part of the Victoria Conference Centre. Designed by Victoria architects Francis Rattenbury and Percy L. James, who were inspired by London's Crystal Palace, it originally housed exotic gardens, dance floors and a saltwater pool. Sauvé feels that Crystal Garden is the ultimate venue for this fun, fashion-show-in-motion event, and that the accessible ticket price offers more opportunities for participation. "There's more capacity for the audience, the runway will be longer…we feel that this time around, there is going to be space for people to mingle, to look at the silent auction… what we're looking for is being comfortable, with the entire event allowing space for all of the activities."

Dance Victoria's mandate is to enrich Victoria's cultural landscape by bringing an annual program of internationally acclaimed dance to the Royal Theatre, and supporting the development of new dance at its studios in Quadra Village.

Cherish *is presented by Kirsty Thomson of Willow Wealth Management of Raymond James Ltd. Tickets, $85. Call 250-386-6121 or visit www.rmts.bc.ca.* —*Mollie Kaye*

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2019 report card

MONICA PRENDERGAST

How well do Victoria theatre companies incorporate gender equity and diversity?

Here it is September again, and therefore a good time to look ahead at what the new theatre season is offering Victoria theatre-goers. It is always equal parts illuminating and frustrating to see where theatre companies are succeeding or failing in their attempts to program more plays by women and minorities, more women and minority directors, and more visible diversity on stage. This last one is a challenge in a city that is still pretty white in its cultural complexion, but as time goes by, the city is diversifying. So the question becomes, is this diversity being seen in our local theatres?

Let's begin this survey with the only full-time professional theatre in the city, the Belfry. Artistic Director Michael Shamata has been very mindful in the past few years, particularly so in the wake of the federal report on Truth and Reconciliation. Each season, Shamata programs an Indigenous play, and this season it is *The Ministry of Grace* by playwright/director Tara Beagan. Opening in February (with *Focus* as media sponsor), this is an all-Indigenous production and a world premiere. The play looks back at a pioneer time of travelling tent revivals, and how a young native woman is presented to a white audience as somehow miraculous because she knows how to read the Bible.

Shamata also scores very well this year in plays by women: the season features three works by women and two by men. And he has hired no fewer than four women directors this season. I am delighted to see that The Belfry has actually surpassed the 50/50 gender equity barrier; perhaps a first for this company?

Now let's turn our attention to our community theatre, Langham Court. Of the six plays and musicals scheduled for the 2019-2020 season, there are two women directors (Heather Jarvie-Laidlaw and Wendy Merk) and two plays by women (Canadian Mieko Ouchi and American Lauren Gunderson). Statistically, this equity balance is in line with the situation across Canadian professional theatre, with around 30 percent of the country's artistic directors, directors and playwrights being women. This maintains a status quo two-thirds majority of what we see on stage as written and directed by men. Langham Court can and should do better to move the needle closer to the 50/50 mark. As to diversifying who is onstage in Langham's shows, I know that the company has become more mindful of reaching out to diverse communities and inviting minority actors to audition for shows. This is a very positive change for those of us (including me) who have been performing in and watching all-white-all-the-time productions at Langham.

The Belfry's Artistic Director Michael Shamata scores high

And what about the season at my employer, the University of Victoria? The Phoenix Theatre this year has four productions, all four of which are directed by men. There is one play by a woman, Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour*. This means that out of eight possible spots for plays and directors, only one is held by a woman, for a gender balance of one-eighth. Not good enough. I would like to see my close colleagues in the Department of Theatre making a more conscious attempt to move toward gender equity in their programming. I know it is challenging, given that they tend to produce plays from the (dead white male) canon, but I contend that it is possible to bring more historical and contemporary plays by women into their students' theatre education. Plus, there are two women faculty members who direct: Jan Wood and Fran Gebhard. These two both directed last season, that is true, but perhaps could be staggered at one a year to increase students' exposure to working with women directors? Or the department could make an effort to invite women professional directors in? The new Applied Theatre professor is Dr Yasmine Kandil, who also holds an MFA in directing, and would add greater diversity to the department as an Egyptian-Canadian woman director. These would be positive changes to see, along with the year-to-year increase in student cultural diversity I'm seeing on stage there.

Theatre Inconnu's artistic director Clayton Jevne programs on an annual calendar, so we are halfway through the 2019 season. He has announced his 2020 season, so let's take a look ahead at that. Jevne has let me know in conversation that he does not consider who wrote a given play, that he is more interested in the play itself. I have always admired Jevne's eclectic approach to his programming, and he often does choose plays by women and often invites women directors in as well. That said, in his yet-to-be-finalized selection for next year (the fourth show is still seeking performance rights), only one of the four is by a woman, Canadian (and personal favourite) Hannah Moscovitch's *East of Berlin*. And Jevne has so far got two of the four directors in place, himself for the fourth show and Kate Rubin for the first show of 2020, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*. So in total, Jevne has chosen one play by a woman and one woman director (2/8 or 1/4), although this may shift as he finalizes his season.

Moving on, Blue Bridge Repertory Theatre has announced its play selection for 2019-2020. Although artistic director Brian

Richmond has not yet announced his choice of directors (this season featured one show directed by Fran Gebhard, *Barefoot in the Park*), his upcoming season features four plays, all of them by men. The plays are all good ones—including *Tartuffe* by Molière, *Salt-Water Moon* by David French and *Betrayal* by Harold Pinter—but I do hope that some women directors will be brought on board to even out the gender imbalance a bit more.

Finally, I will end this column in the same way I have done in the past, by reminding readers where they can find the most diverse theatre on Vancouver Island. Go out to William Head on Stage (WHoS) prison theatre in Metchosin this fall to catch their show that runs on weekends for five weeks from the beginning of October. Director Kathleen Greenfield is working hard with a large number of inmates and a team of all-women collaborators to create a new play rooted in *The Wizard of Oz* as inspiration. I have always felt that the metaphors found in this story would resonate with inmates, as Dorothy and her three friends search for brains, courage, a heart and (most importantly) a way back home.

When I have worked on plays out at WHoS, it has been by far the most diverse group of fellow actors of my career, including men of Caucasian, Asian, Indian, African-Canadian and African-American backgrounds, as well as a large number of Indigenous men. What this says about who ends up in prison I will leave my readers to ponder. But the good news is that this program, the longest-running prison theatre program in Canada, each year gives upwards of 2,000 members of the public a chance to connect with these men, and to speak with them after each performance about what creating a play and performing it on stage means to them.

So there you have it— another full year of theatre in and around Victoria to subscribe to and enjoy.

Monica has seen a number of terrific shows in Toronto, Stratford, Ontario and New York City this year. But she is always happy to come home to see the excellent theatre we produce on our local stages.

Science, Religion and Mistrust • Sept 12-Oct 10

The fall lunchtime lecture series at Christ Church Cathedral (CCC) is promising to be a compelling opportunity for those interested in building community, grappling with controversial subjects, and receiving edification through thoughtful dialogue.

CCC's new-Vicar-on-the-block Reverend Ross Bliss says that the five-week series, entitled "Science, Religion and Mistrust of Institutions," will bring in scientists and other experts to offer facts and information about hot topics like genetic engineering and medically assisted suicide. "Churches are viewed as the antithesis of intellectual activity," Reverend Bliss remarks. "There is this idea of 'blind faith'…that religion is some kind of primitive, fear-based response to the unknown." He says this ignores the genesis of higher education in the West. "Universities' first establishment was in the institutional church."

My refreshingly lively conversation with Reverend Bliss covers many vexing and complex aspects of modern life, revealing a man enormously dedicated to intellectual discourse and thoughtful research. No surprise, then, when he says he had a long career as a secular librarian before undertaking his path to become a vicar. Both the religious and academic aspects of his experience clearly inform this series, which is being curated and organized by retired CCC parishioner Alan Batten, formerly of the Dominion Astrophysical Observatory, National Research Council of Canada (Batten is also presenting the fifth and final lecture, "Whom can we believe and what can we believe?" on October 10).

Each scientific discovery about the mundane workings of our physical world seems to point toward more and more interconnection, yet ideological discord burns hot throughout the world. With so many new findings taking us into "areas that people haven't understood," the vicar says, "the scientists [in the series] are doing the research, and will have the opportunity to have their say, so people can understand. We're not taking a position on these things, that's not our role. Offering information is the philosophical impetus for pulling the series together."

The comfortable "chapter room" at CCC, which seats about 80, is where the lunch-hour lectures will convene at noon each week, and bringing your own food and drinks is not just allowed, it's encouraged. First up, on September 12, is speaker Paul Bramadat, director of UVic's Centre for Studies in Religion and Society, speaking on Conscience, Compassion, and Community in a Post-truth, Post-trust World.

"Science, Religion and Mistrust of Institutions," free admission, Thursdays Sept 12-Oct 10, noon-1pm, Christ Church Cathedral, 930 Burdett. https://www.christchurchcathedral.bc.ca. —*Mollie Kaye*

"BRIGHT HILLSIDE" ROD CHARLESWORTH, 36 X 24 INCHES, OIL ON CANVAS

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West End Gallery

Blending techniques from the Impressionist school, mixed with Group of Seven sensibilities, Rod Charlesworth's splashes of bright colour perfectly describe the wild texture of the Canadian landscape. From Haida Gwaii to Peggy's Cove and up to the Northwest Territories, Rod's sensitivity for capturing the vast Canadian landscape is unparalleled. His work, whether bold landscapes or whimsical images of children at play, is now collected world-wide and he is more committed than ever to painting images that have a strong Canadian cultural influence. 1203 Broad Street, 250-388-0009, www.westendgallery.com.

Ecocide cometh

GENE MILLER

Mahler, artificial intelligence, and Victoria's genius for safety.

"Urlicht," or "Primal Light," is a brief vocal and orchestral introduction to the fourth and final movement of Gustav Mahler's massive Second Symphony, "The Resurrection." Against a spectrally beautiful orchestral accompaniment, the mezzo-soprano sings:

O Röschen rot,
(O red rose)
Der Mensch liegt in größter Not
(Humankind stands in great distress)
Der Mensch liegt in größter Pein
(Humankind suffers great pain)
Je lieber möcht ich im Himmel sein.
(Ever would I prefer to be in heaven.)

Mahler composed his Resurrection Symphony 130 years ago, between 1888 and 1894, the latter by coincidence the very year that Red Rose became a tea company in New Brunswick, Canada. ("Only in Canada, you say? Pity.") History does not record if beverage company founder Theodore Harding Estabrooks was aware of the German composer's music and lyrics; for that matter, neither does it tell us if Mahler was a tea-drinker. It's clear, though, that each man had a different conception of grounds for pity.

"Urlicht" laments the paradoxes and pain of life itself, addressing God as the embodiment of certainty, and Heaven as the house which doubt may not enter. From humanity's beginnings, civilizations and cultures shared an instinctive belief in a force set in opposition to life's randomness and chaos, its sideways threats and unpredictability; and all had (holdouts still have) a religion filled with rules, rewards and peeks at some Hell and Heaven to help manage life's contradictions and our own worst tendencies. As you will have observed, Heaven, God's house, regardless of religious doctrine, is all Answer and no Question, placing it at complete odds with generally silent, answerless reality.

Could you pass me the caramel popcorn, please? No, the whole bag, thanks.

Social historian Morris Berman helps us to understand faith-based, communitarian (Middle-Eastern and other) culture's contempt-filled perception of the West: "Faustian cultures such as those of the West never experience a moment's peace. Their adoration of progress… is but a pseudo-faith devised by people who have lost all inner strength and now believe that economic success will save them. [The West] operates in a world of unacknowledged spiritual despair."

PHOTO: MORITZ NÄHR

Composer Gustav Mahler

Powerful stuff, and a perspective resonantly explored by dozens of today's prominent social thinkers and critics. But it's also possible that argumentation between faithful and faithless cultures is yesterday's rock fight, given technological and futurological trends. We appear to be poised before a novel human chapter likely to render much or all of human civilization "post-historical," by which I mean freed (or adrift) from all conventional navigation, personal and social.

People's offhand view of the AI and robotics-dominated near-future is that it'll be like the present but with lots more whiz-bang—cell phones that cook breakfast, maybe. But I sense a discontinuous near-future less about rocket cars whisking us Jetsons-style to some orbital Wal-Mart, and more a time of shocking and stressful species evolution. (Read Sean Silcoff's Sept. 7, 2018 *Globe and Mail* story "She looks like a human. Can she be taught to think like one too?" and *Science Daily's* piece about Artificial Intelligence starting to show "subjective" indications of prejudice and preference.)

History doesn't make mistakes; it operates as a record of evolutionary favourabilities, choices and foreclosures. Nature permits a tolerance, within limits, of all living forms, but evolution, "the development of living forms of greater complexity," is not known for forbearance or mercy. With AI, we are culturally table-setting for a post-human era—represented by AI with ever-more-human qualities and super-human capacities—essentially, an expanded and profoundly altered definition of "living form." In this view, AI is not accident but inevitability… the embodiment of our species' evolutionary mission: to perfect ourselves, to triumph over nature by outstripping its creative talents and "monopoly," its controls, limits, rules, ambiguities, indifference, our physical frailty, the sheer (or mere) meat of us… and all that vegetative, biological stupidity.

From the perspective of such looming possibilities, it seems both inspired and prescriptive that sci-fi has featured beings who communicate telepathically, who can move or immobilize things with their minds, levitate, release lightning bolts from their outstretched palms, time-travel, move about the universe at will, know the future; that is, everything "biological" us can't.

The convergence of this almost magical robotics/AI evolutionary climax with human-caused biospheric collapse is itself the stuff of top-drawer sci-fi: that is, we are consciously—you might say intentionally—crafting a suicidal last human chapter worthy of its nickname: ecocide. I'm speculating that climate change is, in its deepest expression, a goodbye note, a knowing act of human self-extinction; in other words, we don't care, even though our environmental misbehaviour will kill us.

How to account for this?

We are an unstable mix of gratitude (love and celebration of life) and implosive anger (conscious foreknowledge of decay and death). We had to labour for 200,000 years to perfect our capacities, to be able, in a final ecocidal act, to show Mommy Nature what we think of her plan and her domination.

Civilizations, confronting unanticipated and novel structures of thought and opportunity, allow more room for risk. People dismiss climate warnings as fiction or lefty hand-

WE HAD TO LABOUR for 200,000 years to perfect our capacities, to be able, in a final ecocidal act, to show Mommy Nature what we think of her plan and her domination.

wringer hysteria because humility, a "sense of right place"—the reflex that you're part of some living (and social) endeavour larger than yourself—has evaporated. The liberations and empowerments of consumerism married to the irresistible masteries of technology, combined with other evolutionary conceits, have fostered a state of triumph (however illusory), rendering each of us ever-more-autonomous—gig citizens, if I may coin that term. Why form or practice values based on mutuality and interdependency—responsibility for and connection with others, and with a living world—when your experience tells you that nearly all relationships are voluntary and transactional? Why practice humility or self-subordination? Why give up all that freedom and personal power, even if, culturally, socially, it simply produces competition of all against all?

This rangy and fretful preamble lands us, unsurprisingly, at Victoria's doorstep.

I invite you first, in this global atmosphere of specific and growing threat, to consider how community safety is manufactured and sustained—where it comes from, how it's reinforced, what *story*, so to speak, supports it, and second, to give serious thought to what *city* and *community* actually mean; that is, the singular purpose of a city or a particular place (really, the people gathered within, including you). Nobody says that Victoria's a small Toronto or a big Prince Rupert. Victoria is, well, itself—but what does that mean?

This city seems to trigger a powerful sense of yearning in people; it tugs deeply on our hearts. People in our city of strongly delineated and self-declared communities crave authorship over physical and social change. Life here is intensely and appealingly local, a compelling reason for Victoria's magical appeal. I believe Victoria, through a thousand bits of "body English," covenants with its citizens to keep threat and worry at bay—no small or common thing, or condition to be assumed, as we near the dangerous clarities of 2020.

I contend the work of citizens here is to sustain and to bring new energy to the civic story—that is, to invest effort and to reap the harvest of pleasures of such continuity (stability, social sanity, identity). Victoria, by cultivating its past, its customs, as living memory and social practice, persuasively advances the project of human safety for those who live here, which is a noble and exemplary thing to do in these ambiguous and clearly parlous times.

There are synonyms for all the above: "community" and "citizenship," by which I mean structures of cooperation, activities—duties calling for a certain amount of self-subordination, even—for civic engagement, city-making.

Victoria was the stern parent for long years. It hit me like a force of nature when I got here in 1970. There was a legible social landscape, and behavioural borders at which disapproval stood like a sentry (dim, remnant echoes remain). The place had edges and limits, ensuring certainty, and a subtle security and comfort. Yes, it was a bit stuffy and suffocating, un-modern; trendy Vancouver made jokes at our expense, but at least we knew where the corners were. (Now, Vancouver's just another identity-less urban nowhere.)

And we in Victoria today are left with… what? Pricey real estate (always a sign of devitalized cultural certainty). Now, to our shame (and rue), we practice the dark architectural art of creating buildings that render people anonymous, absent, unconnected strangers with diminishing grounds (or call) for civic allegiance… just when Victoria, in this rudderless world, needs the strongest possible and most widely shared sense of community identity.

The skills of creating and sustaining civic community are so vulnerable to ambush by the world's anxious novelties, leaving people with the vague sense that "things were better when," but with little idea of how to constructively adapt, or to re-cast and renew those conditions.

As 2020—that year of perfect and terrifying visual focus—looms, ask yourself, really, what tools beside the intentional practice of community—our connection to each other—do we have to face the dark?

Founder of Open Space and *Monday Magazine*, Gene Miller is now a small-time real estate developer, currently promoting his affordable housing concept ASH.

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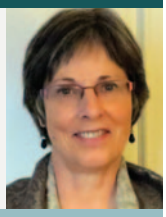

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Harry Drage's mission

MALEEA ACKER

Saving forests and removing invasives in Saanich.

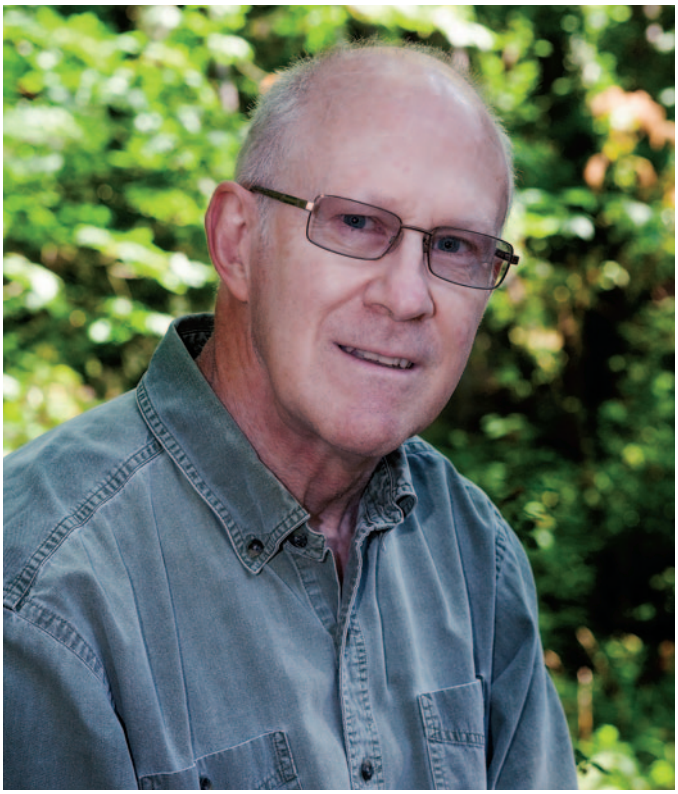

PHOTO: TONY BOUNSALL

Harry Drage

From his home in East Saanich, Harry Drage tells me "It's fun to say that you worked your entire career in the forests of BC." A member of the Saanich Environmental Advisory Committee for over ten years, Drage, a forester, has been an ardent volunteer in both Haro Woods and Konukson Park (in East Saanich) since his retirement. This summer, Drage received Saanich's Individual Environmental Achievement Award for 15 years of leadership in stewarding invasive species removal in Haro Woods and Konukson, a testament to his dedication to local ecosystems.

Together with local residents, Drage has removed invasive species, applied for grants, helped to inspire the community and supported student research in the parks. He and other volunteers have logged over 4,500 hours clearing large areas of invasive species from both parks. Konukson encompasses seven hectares of upland terrain in Ten Mile Point, with arbutus and rocky outcrops; Haro Woods is a large parcel northeast (5.6 hectares) of the University of Victoria, with tall stands of second-growth Douglas fir.

"Haro is about half done," Drage tells me, and now, areas that have been cleared of invasives are recovering well, with ferns, snowberry and other native underbrush sprouting up under the firs. "You can actually see the [restored] area of the park gradually moving through like a force not to be denied," he laughs.

Haro Woods was the centre of recent controversy during the planning for the region's sewage treatment facility, which will see wastewater and biosolids pumped to McLoughlin Point in Esquimalt for treatment. As part of the plan, Haro Woods was proposed as the site for a series of underground attenuation tanks and an above-ground pumping station; the construction would have seen a significant portion of forest cut down. In 2009, public consultation around the Haro Woods site resulted in strong pushback by local residents. I remember attending those meetings (at the time as an employee of the CRD). Haro Woods, then an unprotected greenspace zoned for large lot residential development, was nonetheless known informally as a forested trail system, and supported a variety of uses (including mountain bike trails). Some of the meetings grew quite heated.

Drage demurs talking about this period. "I know some people think confrontation is hard to overcome," he says. He tries to remain optimistic, focusing instead on the cooperation between residents' associations and developers, and the growing support for the environment, and biodiversity, by Saanich. "We have 50 volunteer projects [in the municipality] with people stepping up. They're coming forward on their own. That's a really good sign."

As a result of the community's resistance to the proposed pumping station site, the CRD retreated from its plan. Attenuation tanks will still be built on part of the site, but they will be located underground in a previously disturbed area. In 2011, Saanich purchased the CRD-owned portions of the site for $7.6 million, allowing for protection of 94 percent of the urban forest as parkland in 2013. For Drage, who began restoration work long before the land caught the CRD's eye as a potential sewage treatment site, it simply shows the commendable actions of Saanich, which, along with the acquisition of Panama Flats in 2011, added 79 hectares to its park inventory in one year.

Drage applauds the purchase, and his experiences in the park mirror many I heard speak at those 2009 community consultation sessions. The decision to save Haro Woods, however, many not be as simple as portrayed by former Mayor Frank Leonard's joyous announcement.

Saanich is the largest municipality in the CRD, and its reach stretches beyond the high-value properties of Queenswood, Ten Mile Point and Cadboro Bay, where many residents have time to become organized defenders of local green spaces. There are numerous properties throughout Saanich's land base that would also seem to demand attention. Priorities change depending on the lens through which we look. Haro Woods is a recovering second-growth forest. Drage's work has rid approximately half the park of invasive species. The other half sits waiting, while Saanich concludes its park management plan. But damage to the park over the decades—by invasives, through the construction of mountain-bike jumps, and through heavy use by residents—is extensive.

In contrast, one might look at the protection of Maltby Lake, also within Saanich's boundaries (and covered in this magazine). From an ecological perspective, Maltby has a much higher biodiversity rating; it contains old-growth pockets of Douglas fir; it supports a colony of freshwater jellyfish and dozens of listed species. And it could eventually be connected to Francis King Park, forming a contiguous wildlife corridor through the area. Maltby is owned in part by the Land Conservancy of BC, and in part by private landowners. Should that $7.6 million have been put instead toward purchase of

> "YOU CAN ACTUALLY SEE the [restored] area of the park gradually moving through like a force not to be denied."—*Harry Drage*

portions of Maltby, or of other parts of the Saanich Highlands, which are under increasing threat from development?

Drage has another solution. As a forester trained in the latter half of the 20th century, he subscribes to management practices that see a forest as a resource or a crop, as well as an ecological refugium. For much of his career, Drage was district manager in the Salmon Arm and Shushwap Lake area. In Victoria, he worked as an analyst for the BC Forest Practices branch, including planning for woodlots. For him, city boulevards—and forests such as Haro Woods—provide an opportunity for use as woodlots.

City trees could be a part of this plantation, offers Drage, with orchards planted on side streets (and even on some lanes of streets, he offers) and selective harvesting of larger forests. It's a novel vision. But when asked, he doesn't have a ready answer to the question of biodiversity levels in mature forests as opposed to woodlots. The former support species such as great horned owls and bats. The latter tend not to have the decaying trees and forest floor detritus necessary to house and feed these creatures.

Still, planting more trees would certainly help bolster Saanich's currently spotty record with boulevard tree planting. "To me," he says, "[boulevard planting] isn't moving very far very fast. The profile needs to be increased." One of the simplest ways to combat global warming, he stresses, is through the planting of trees. As someone who's been trying to get my nearly treeless street in Saanich planted for over seven years, I concur. Drage would also like to see more incentives for landowners and developers to choose nature-scaping and the retention of trees on their properties.

When beginning work in Haro Woods and Konukson, Drage had to read up on invasives before he knew what to look for in each park's tangle of English ivy, Daphne, Himalayan blackberry and Scotch broom. In Konukson, he and other volunteers sectioned off areas to work methodically, somewhat like what's happening in Cuthbert Holmes Park, in Saanich's Tillicum neighbourhood, or the meticulous record-keeping that Jarrett Teague does for John Dean Park. "It's almost a war, in some cases it's so thick," he says. "When the last invasive [in a section] comes out of the ground screaming in agony, it's not fun, but it's close to that."

Haro Woods and Konukson are all the better for his and his compatriots' dedication. "It's amazing to walk through [the park] now. The natural plants have come back—oh, it was fabulous," he says. Due to the region's deer overpopulation problem, the rebound of native species in some areas hasn't been as quick as he'd like to see, but he has a solution for that, too. "Venison could become the feature meal out of the forest!" he tells me. I offer to provide the wild blackberry sauce to complete the dish.

Maleea Acker is the author of *Gardens Aflame: Garry Oak Meadows of BC's South Coast*. She is currently completing a PhD in Human Geography, focusing on the intersections between social sciences and poetry.

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Our government needs us to show resolve

TRUDY DUIVENVOORDEN MITIC

Tired of being used by the corporate world? Revolt by exercising the common-sense muscle.

We have a unique little experiment going on right here in our own corner of Canada. You will recall the City of Victoria's ban last year on single-use polyethylene shopping bags at all retail establishments. Other than stirring up a few anticipated moans and groans, it came into effect with very little protest.

That's not surprising, considering how many people had already made the switch to reusable bags or at least acclimatized to the notion that reducing plastic is a good thing. Retailers didn't mind either, given that they were all being equally "disadvantaged" and, more notably, alleviated from the hefty and ongoing cost of buying single-use bags for the same customers over and over again.

No, the only real lament came, predictably, from the plastics industry, whose justification for their single-use products employs the kind of skewed logic that's getting increasingly more awkward to defend with a straight and sincere face. The Canadian Plastic Bag Association—its name a billboard flashing self-interest—wasted no time clamouring its outrage. Depriving the people of their convenience is not fair, it insisted, even as several island communities were fine-tuning their own bans, and people all over were already eschewing single-use plastics without legal prompting. Faster than one can say "Polyethylene lasts forever," the Association challenged the ban in court, claiming the City did not have the jurisdiction to regulate business. The CPBA won that round recently, but the battle is not over, and in any event, the City's end goal of eradicating some plastic from the landscape will probably be achieved.

Next?

Why? Because it's hard to keep momentum reined in when the public has decided to move forward. Courts can order municipal governments to back off, but people can't be forced to buy or use what they no longer wish to consume. A recent Nanos poll shows that most Canadians now favour banning single-use plastics, including the ubiquitous plastic bag. Grocers already know this. The Canadian food giant Sobey's will remove plastic checkout bags from all 255 stores by next February. That change alone will keep 225 million plastic bags from having to be absorbed by the planet every year. (Thrifty Foods, owned by Sobey's, turfed these bags from their 25+ stores 10 years ago.)

The federal government, in a hardworking election year, has jumped on this accelerating bandwagon too, by announcing a ban on single-use plastics by "as early as" 2021. The faraway date and lack of concrete plan might make a cynic wonder if this is just more cheap campaign chatter, but never mind the politicians. It's people who create change— by getting enough of the grunt work done to propel a growing shift in thinking that eventually results in legislation to pull along the rest of us who'd never get there on our own.

There's plenty out there needing public resolve: apparently, Imperial Metals can walk away from the catastrophe it caused at its Mount Polley mine, and still go hunting for a new site to exploit in the Manning Park wilderness.

Apparently, watershed areas can be logged in this province because, you know, jobs, jobs, jobs; and apparently, towns like Glade in the Kootenay region have, alarmingly, no legal right to clean water, having recently had this clearly laid out by a BC Supreme Court Justice. Apparently, our government is falling seriously short of protecting everyone's drinking water from the ravages of climate change and industrial enterprise, according to BC auditor general Carol Bellringer.

Apparently, federal Conservative leader Andrew Scheer has promised the food industry that he will "review" the new Canada Food Guide if he wins the upcoming election. We finally have a food guide based on solid, independent research in nutrition—that's neither imposing nor forbidding any food choices—and he would let it be reshaped by businesses that are intent on defining the "healthy" foods as the ones they have to sell.

Apparently, so much is happening that we can't keep track. Still, we have the muscle to wrestle government attention back onto our concerns and priorities. For starters, we can vote next month, with the future, rather than the past, in mind. We can sign petitions, write letters, and stand or march in peaceful determination for the things that absolutely need to change.

The greatest impact will come from being a cautious and conscientious consumer. Business can only afford to make what we want to use. They're forced to either fold up or reinvent themselves when we turn away.

We're already saying no to redundant plastic. What happens next is truly up to us.

After finishing this column, Trudy Duivenvoorden Mitic retreated to her garden, where the laws of nature still reassuringly prevail.

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