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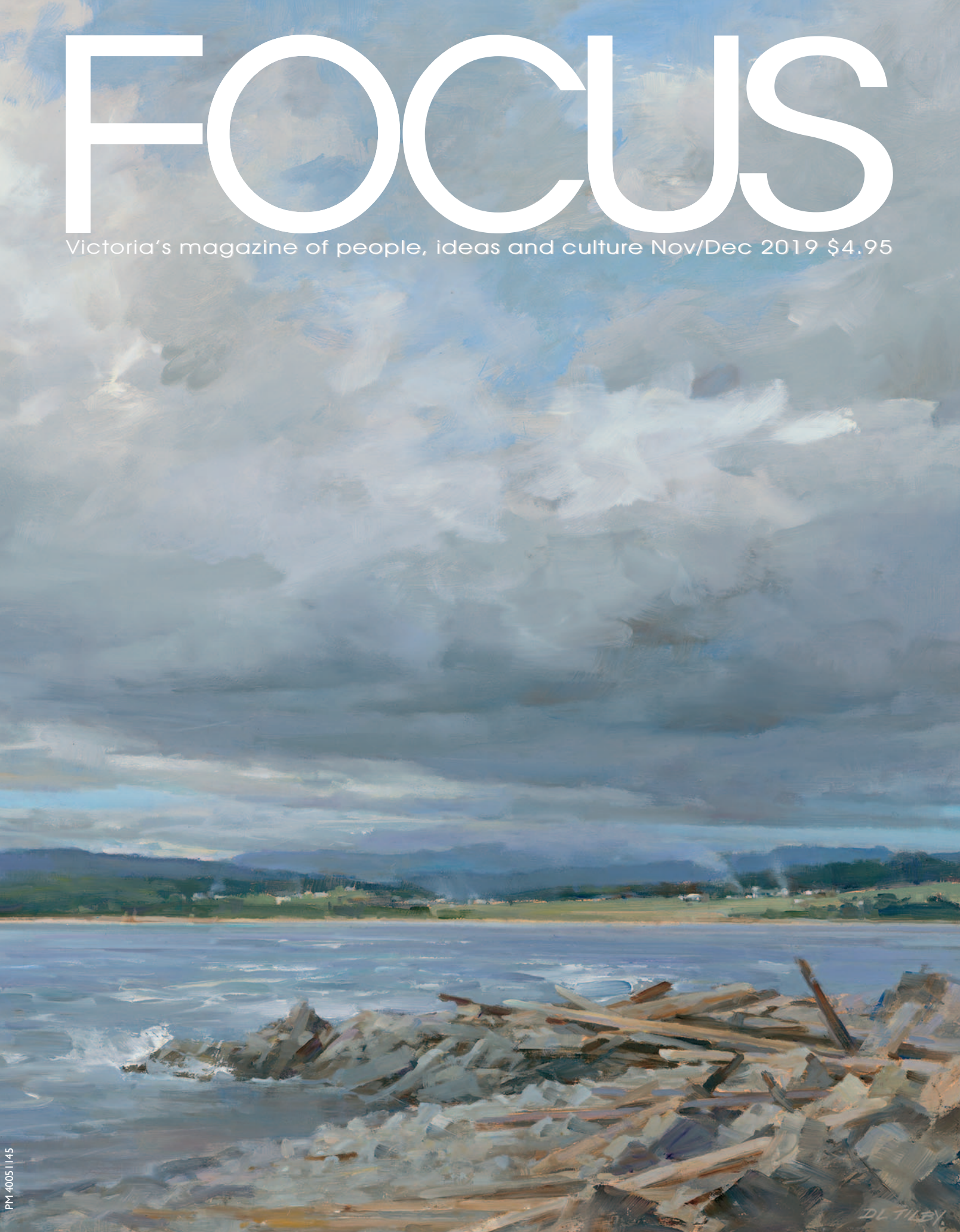

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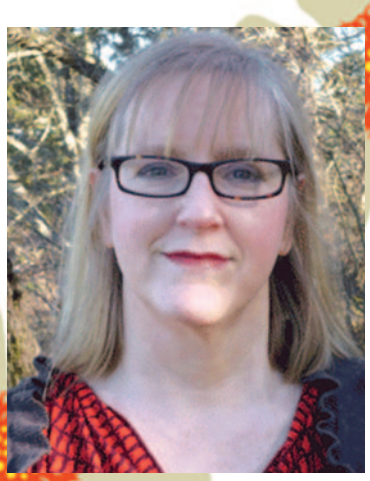

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"Clouds Over The Sea," by Deborah Tilby, 20 x 20 inches, oil on canvas. See story on page 38.

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Tug-of-war over school lands

LESLIE CAMPBELL

Victoria's affordable housing crisis puts the bullseye on public land in Fernwood.

Within walking distance of my own home is one of my favourite city neighbourhoods: Fernwood. I love its diversity, its heritage homes, it's artsy, alternative vibe and lack of pretentiousness.

These days its experiencing a lot of community angst over a proposed housing development on lands owned mostly by School District 61 to the west of Vic High. Called the Caledonia, it will offer 154 units of desperately needed affordable non-market housing. The Fernwoodians I know say they have no issue with the "affordable" aspect. Instead they are concerned with its size, the impacts on the neighbourhood's traffic, the precedent it will set for further development, and the loss of School District-owned land.

Ownership before (left) and after the land swap. The project would go on the SD 61 land (blue swath, right).

The developer—in this case the CRD's Capital Region Housing Corporation (CRHC)—has submitted its development application to City Hall, and is requesting rezoning and Official Community Plan (OCP) amendments, with the hope of a fall 2020 construction start. In total there are five separate buildings, including three-storey townhouse rows, and four- and five-storey apartment buildings, with 109 parking stalls underneath.

The first the community heard about the new Caledonia project was last November when an agreement was announced among the City, CRHC, BC Housing and School District 61 (SD61) to create the large housing complex. This "Letter of Intent" was both an agreement to work out a "land swap" among the players and a vision for the 154-unit housing complex. The land swap would "assemble" a 9,000 square-foot rectangular lot, owned by SD61, but leased for 60 years to CRHC which would build the housing. The City of Victoria would end up owning the Compost Education Centre, Spring Ridge Community Gardens and Haegert Park, all important community spaces currently owned by the School District. It was a big deal.

After some feedback from the community, CRHC made changes to its plan, and last summer held an open house for the community. Christine Culham, a senior manager with CRHC, told me, "I do think we've been really thoughtful in the way we listened to the community around their concerns." She mentioned that building heights have been reduced (though there's still one at five storeys)—and topmost floors of the two higher ones "stepped back" to appear less massive. Neighbourhood traffic concerns led to changes in the configuration of entrances. A building of 1,500 square feet was added to provide community space.

Long-time Fernwood resident and Fernwood Community Association board member Dorothy Field emailed me in August, saying, "the proponents, CRHC are treating it as a totally done deal. The Fernwood community is not very happy, so the designers have tweaked the plan a bit with 'green' addenda but nothing substantive has changed." She noted that Fernwoodians are supportive of a new development which provides low-income housing, but "we are distressed at the size, density, and height of this proposal. When asked if the number of apartments could be reduced, CRHC said, 'No, that's the arithmetic.'"

Culham explained to me that while they try hard to keep everyone happy, the number-one priority of the City of Victoria and the CRD is affordable housing, so that weighs heavily in the balancing of objectives. Building costs have increased 36 percent, she notes, "so it's difficult to make a property affordable without any government grant or intervention. Right now both the provincial and federal governments are coming to the table with funding…that hasn't happened in 20 years, so we're looking to take advantage of those grants; you never know when they're going to go away." The Caledonia project has already been approved for provincial funding, partly because of its high number of units.

Given the cost of land and construction, the only way to have affordability in the City of Victoria is to create density, Culham continued. "How do we get the best use out of land? Just like the fire hall, building up is the only way we're going to be able to get that." In the case of the Caledonia, she says, "I am mindful and I am empathetic to the challenge around change, but I do think that the benefits outweigh the change that is occurring."

Culham, who lived in Fernwood in the past and appreciates its special character, feels the Caledonia's proximity to Cook Street and its amenities mean its "walkability score is off the charts."

> "IT STARTS TO LOOK MORE AND MORE LIKE a done deal, like we're all just going through the motions, just playing this huge game." —*David Maxwell, Chair of the Fernwood Community Association's Land Use Committee*

A passionate advocate for affordable housing, she sees the provision of it in the City of Victoria as a matter of fairness and equity. With 61 percent of those living in the City of Victoria being renters—with a median household income of $44,600—the average rent they can afford is $1100 per month. But the average rent for listed vacancies in the City is now close to $1500 per month. So in her analysis, with Caledonia rents averaging $1000, she is building housing for the majority of the population. "Those are the people we *don't* hear from, even though we have 1,500 waiting for homes on the BC Housing Registry," she said.

I MET WITH FERNWOOD RESIDENTS Dorothy Field and Trish Richards for a look at the site of the proposed housing on a sunny fall day. They first pointed out to me the CRHC housing already occupying some of the SD61 land. Built in 1992, there are 18 units for families in the attached townhouse structure (also called Caledonia). Only 27 years old, it will be torn down, not just to make room for the new development but, according to Culham, because "it's a leaky condo." In 2012, the CRHC was given a remediation estimate of $130,000 per unit.

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation defines leaky condos as a "catastrophic failure" of building envelopes, which lets water into the building frame and leads to rot, rust, decay and mould. It has been attributed in part to a building boom in the 1980s and early '90s, which led to a high demand for workers and materials, and in turn to lower-quality construction and materials. It's not a stretch to think something like it could happen again, given the current construction boom.

Culham told me residents of the old Caledonia will have first right of refusal once the new buildings are complete. Meanwhile, they have been offered alternative units in other CRHC buildings.

One current resident, who came by to talk to us as we wandered around, said seven families had already moved out, which seemed premature given nothing had been approved—including the land swap and the rezoning from a combination of "Traditional Residential" and "Parks" to "Urban Residential."

The resident said that due to her special needs, she was having to look at housing out in the Royal Oak area.

As we chatted in the sunshine, David Maxwell came by on his bike. He is the chair of Fernwood Community Association's Land Use Committee. He noted that CRHC has known for years about the problems their tenants have been living with and dragged their feet on remediation of the 18 units. "Why should we have faith CRHC will be able to manage 154 units properly?" he asked.

Maxwell and Richards agreed that the first order of business was to let the School Board know they should not be giving up any more school land. Besides the land under the existing Caledonia, much of the lot is "rubble fields" resulting from the demolition of the Fairey Tech school buildings in 2011 (the tech programs moved to a new facility). It was understood by the neighbourhood that this area would provide, once remediated, more green and activity space for the school and community. Eight years later that still hadn't happened.

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PERHAPS I SHOULD REMIND READERS that Vic High's renewal was the subject of a lengthy process of public consultation involving three options for upgrading and necessary seismic work. The community made it clear they preferred the Full Monty, involving seismic and other improvements, as well as creating room for 200 more students and a Neighbourhood Learning Centre. In June 2018, the School Board unanimously supported it. The price tag was $79.7 million.

No one was warned, however, "If you choose this option, we'll have to build housing on school lands." Yet when the new Caledonia project was first announced last November, and through subsequent consultations, raising needed funds to fix Vic High was part of the rationale.

At the end of June 2019, however, the Province came though with $77.1 million in funding for the high school upgrades—leaving SD61 with only $2.6 million to raise. People are now questioning whether the School Board should be entering into long-term leases on Vic High lands when such a small amount could likely be raised by any number of less-invasive means.

Chief among those people are Fernwood residents Scott Fox and Corey Kowal. Throughout the fall they've been making the rounds of School Board and committee meetings with well-polished power point presentations.

The father of two girls who currently attend George Jay Elementary and will likely attend Vic High, Fox's background as a business analyst is apparent in his presentations. Kowal, like Fox, lives with her family near Vic High. She has a background in strategic planning and operations management with the BC government.

Using aerial shots of different local high school grounds, Kowal argued at one SD61 committee meeting that Vic High, after the proposed removal of land for housing, would have less space per child than most other high schools in the district. School green space, research has shown, correlates with improved mental health, safety and school pride, she said, noting, "Once the land is gone, it's gone." With an inner-city school like Vic High, where many students don't have their own back yards, it's especially important to have green and activity space available.

Ministry of Education regulations call for each school in the province to provide a minimum of five hectares of land per 1,000 students. Fox worked out the space left for educational purposes after the land swap to be 4.69 hectares per 1,000 students.

Culham disputes those numbers; in CHRC's analysis, there would still be 5.05 hectares per 1,000 students after the land swap.

Either way, of course, it's very close to the minimum requirement.

At an October presentation to the School Board, Fox gave another power point, this one suggesting a lack of due diligence around the land swap. He said that there had been no land appraisals performed by qualified independent appraisers; that no cost benefit analysis had been performed regarding the land swap; and that there had been no internal controls to prevent bias and collusion, as is recommended by the BC Auditor for any real estate asset sale.

Fox and Kowal, along with others, have formed the Vic High Neighbourhood Action Group, with a website (www.itsnotsurplus.com) and will host information sessions on November 5 & 6, both 7:30-9 pm at 1923 Fernwood Road.

SD61 is holding an open house on the issue on November 12, 6-8 pm at Vic High's Roper Gym. It is expected the board will vote on the land swap shortly thereafter.

THERE ARE NO LESS THAN FOUR levels of government aligned behind the Caledonia project: SD61, CRHC of the CRD, BC Housing, and the City of Victoria. The development package submitted to the City by CRHC includes a 33-page book full of persuasive details about the need for affordable housing, the appropriateness of the site (a "walker's paradise"), and the project's many admirable features including energy efficiency, urban agriculture, rain gardens, tot play areas, and a new city "greenway."

In late October, David Maxwell, chair of FCA's Land Use Committee, was alarmed to learn from a City of Victoria planner that, despite the School Board not having decided yet to go ahead with the land swap, the development application had already moved through all the necessary departments—regarding roads, utilities, sewer, etc—with recommended changes sent to the CRHC. Though the planner assured him "this is the way it's done all the time," in Maxwell's mind, it seemed premature and wasteful. "This is public property, funded by the taxpayers, as are all the City and CRHC staff involved…[They] are wasting all that money before knowing whether it can go ahead." Echoing others, he says, "It starts to look more and more like a done deal, like we're all just going through the motions, just playing this huge game." (It doesn't help that Mayor Helps and School Board Chair Jordan Watters have made positive comments about the development.)

The Fernwood Land Use Committee will soon give the City a formal response on the Caledonia application indicating its lack of support due to the needed OCP and zoning changes, said Maxwell; "We don't have any five-storey buildings near there." He believes if such height and density are allowed there, it will set a precedent for the whole area west of the site, over to Cook Street.

Fernwood community members know that affordable housing is needed, but have noticed the City hasn't done much to generate such housing in all the other developments council has approved. As Field pointed out to me, "We also have four large developments approved or almost approved that will add to pressure on existing public infrastructure: Wellburn's, St Andrews, the former co-housing site [Fernwood Commons at Chambers and North Park], a large new tower at Chambers and Johnson…the City has not negotiated affordable suites in any of these new buildings." (Going forward, the City's new inclusionary zoning policy will require 20 percent of all units in larger developments to be affordable.)

The task of adding affordable housing, especially in core neighbourhoods, gets more difficult by the minute. Victoria continues to attract those who have wealth—to retire here, to have second homes here, to invest here, causing land values to increase. As Culham pointed out, this makes it difficult to provide enough housing for citizens of modest means—those who work in our nursing homes, shops, offices and cafes. It's little wonder that once-sancrosanct school lands, churches, and heritage buildings are now being eyed by developers, including those building affordable housing.

Perhaps it's time for neighbourhoods to be more proactive, implementing a bottom-up approach wherein they themselves come up with neighbourhood-supported ideas for increased affordable housing.

Websites of all the organizations mentioned above offer more information. Access Caledonia's development application via www.focusonvictoria.ca.

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— Reverend Al

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Strong sanctions needed for destroying public records

At first blush, I thought Leslie Campbell's editorial was going to be about the Harper government 's destruction of records. However, the first couple of words dispelled that. But, just as Harper's heavy-handed governance revealed signs of autocracy, so too do the "Mini Me" governing tendencies of the City of Victoria, Esquimalt, and indeed our current and recent past provincial governments.

The desire to hide (or obfuscate) "inconvenient truths" seems to be pandemic to British Columbia; and, if this is so, there is no reason to assume it is not a plague in this entire country.

Richard Weatherill

As a citizen, my personal experience with Freedom of Information requests to the City of Victoria has been less than satisfactory. In particular I have sought source data for the City's press releases and media reports regarding short-term rental licensing and compliance reports with very little success.

I also draw your attention to a recent change at City Hall. It appears the City of Victoria has removed the email server addresses for its senior management group: Jocelyn Jenkins, Chris Coates, Susanne Thompson, as well as all department heads.

The only public emails listed on the City of Victoria website directory are for general information, with the exception of Bill Eisenhower's email contact, which is for media inquiries.

When I spoke with Christine Havelka (Legislative Services) about the inability to contact the Renters' Advisory Committee (a committee appointed by the mayor), she indicated that council is not seeking input from anyone other than the 12 individuals appointed. This is contrary to the protocol of a similar committee operating under the direction of the City of Vancouver, which has provided their Renters' Advisory Committee with full information on the committee plus three contacts—an email address for the committee as well as two additional names, telephone numbers and email addresses for a housing staff member and meeting coordinator.

It seems that the openness, transparency, and accountability window is being dramatically closed to members of the public. This also comes at a time when the mayor has decided not only to leave Facebook but also close her Twitter account due to too much negative feedback.

Perhaps it's coincidental, but the City's website changes seem to coincide with your "duty to document"—a critical part of public access to information which is sorely absent in the City of Victoria's governance model.

Victoria Adams

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Huggett's greatest hits

Thank you David Broadland for your educational rants about the new Blue Bridge.

One doesn't know whether to laugh or cry at the collective incompetence of the "experts" involved, and the lackadaisical approach of Victoria's councillors.

Let's hope that the renovations, modifications, and quality of work going on at the Bay Street Bridge are superior to those of the new Blue Bridge. I'm sure the Bay Street Bridge will be pressed into service far more often than was ever intended.

Jack Clover

Water torture

I must commend Gene Miller for his last two searing articles: Water Torture (July/August 2019) and Ecocide Cometh (Sept/October 2019).

I have read Miller's articles for years, and at times was lost in the language, metaphor and hidden messaging. These last two articles have laid bare his message, and it is one that all Victorians should heed: without a sense of community, and protection of what Nature we were blessed with when our ancestors (or us) first arrived, this place will become a lego-block duplicate of many other featureless, urban/suburban cityscapes across North America. Victoria is now seen as a refuge for well-heeled refugees from around the world, who can, in his words, enjoy "progressive living"—the life you want for yourself—filled with self-celebration, apotheosis, the happy marriage of intelligence, education and good taste, all of it validated and made worry-free by a terrific income and a gilt-edged investment portfolio.

"Living the dream" is a passable colloquial synonym, he concludes. All this worry-free living at the expense of the last few remnants of one of the most endangered ecosystems in the country, and at the expense of the First Peoples who watched those ancestors arrive, and welcomed them.

The year 2020 could be, as Mr Miller states, "the year of perfect and terrifying visual focus" given the rapid and unpredictable advances of climate change, and the political drift toward loud and dangerous strongmen running countries around the globe. What tools do we have to face the dark, he asks?

I agree with his conclusion: "the intentional practice of community," and would add respect for and communion with the First Peoples who are still here, and the natural ecosystems that they (and we) will have to depend on, if all else fails elsewhere (and here).

Thomas Munson

Looking our future squarely in the eye

A couple of colleagues and I were talking the other day when one of us said, "We must tell the kids the truth." We all agreed.

The truth is, we've missed the window for stopping climate change. As Naomi Klein said on CBC radio (Sept 17), "Climate Change is here, and we have to face what that means."

So what does it mean?

It means that before 2100, Earth's human population will decrease by roughly five billion people from its peak of about nine billion around 2030. Climate change will not be the only cause—starvation, disease, economic and social collapse, and, at worst, violence and war will bring about our population crash.

We are rushing like proverbial lemmings towards a cliff, urged on by governments and corporate elites. But there is something we can do. We can go over the cliff-edge with parachutes!

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I don't know exactly what form our parachutes might take. They will, however, encompass more democratic governments, and a more equitable distribution of wealth—"more sharing" as Naomi Klein put it. To do this, we must undergo a paradigm shift in the way we think and act.

Will we reach that tipping point in time? The current climate strikes by our youth give me hope.

Philip Symons

Who, me?

It seems that every time I read *Focus* I say to myself, "Best issue ever;" and I wonder how the magazine can continue on this trajectory, but it does. I especially appreciate the in-depth reporting of important political, social, and environmental issues that does not stop with just one article and then move on to the next "newsworthy" item. And I truly appreciate *Focus* not dwelling on lurid topics of death and destruction, even if they are real, but rather covering such topics with inquiry instead of sensationalism.

I tutor science for children, and volunteer at a local elementary school, and so appreciate investigative articles like David Broadland's "Who, me?" I enjoy delving into the language of science with children; I also like talking politics with them. And so "science curiosity," the "hunger for the unexpected, driven by the anticipated pleasure of surprise," as described by Professor Dan Kahan in Broadland's article, is something I want to practice. More importantly, it is a crucial reminder for me to always check the facts, even if what I read (and pass on) comes from a source so respected that I might just assume "this is true because Dr Suzuki said so."

I worked to re-elect Green Party candidate Paul Manly for my federal riding, and the one thing I count on from Mr Manly is truthful statements about the work we all need to do. I'm very glad to have *Focus* reminding me to always ask whether a policy is good for the planet, or just good for the party. I also need to know that if it's good for the planet, party lines can be crossed for cooperation and collaboration, and that means not becoming culturally polarized, but instead converging on the best evidence relating to controversial facts.

Susan Yates

Your September/October edition was great. It's terrific having a print alternative to the *Times-Colonist*. How many op-eds have they run by Gwyn Morgan? Oh yeah, we know about the critical importance of the dynamic, cutting-edge oil industry yadda yadda. Jeez, I never had sleep apnea before. I don't under....zzzzzzzz.

Jonathan Huggett sounds like a primo example of "consultant creep" wherein civil service engineers who should be doing their jobs aren't. Thus, we pay bloated costs for outsiders, who don't do much of a job either. At least the scale of the bloat hasn't reached that in California. There, the LA-Bay Area high-speed rail project (a most worthwhile undertaking, contrary to Elon Musk's Hyperloop sci fi) has bogged down in armies of consultants tripping over each other while drawing astronomical salaries.

I was delighted to read that longtime Liberal David Merner bailed on his party the day Justin Trudeau announced that our taxes are paying for the Trans-Mountain Pipeline. Trudeau is happy to waste other people's money propping up a lumbering industry that needs to sail into the sunset. But then, Justin's grandpappy Charley got rich off gas stations in Montreal, so our PM just can't cut loose from the buggy-whip business.

Louis Guilbault

Time to clean house

Here is a plea for us to raise the bar in the quality and competency of our local politicians in Victoria. There appears to be a worsening trend regarding City of Victoria politicians and their increasing lack of transparency, lack of accountability, and intellectual arrogance.

Many Victoria councillors routinely don't bother returning the respectful, earnest emails and queries of their constituents. Some councillors are on-going media hounds, looking for beneficial PR on certain hot-button issues (such as Climate Catastrophe and social housing) and then go incommunicado when the going gets tough.

Victoria council declared a "Climate Emergency" but acts, on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis, as if an emergency doesn't actually exist. Mayor Helps has tolerated the unbridled abuse of our natural assets by developers, with her strident pro-developer attitudes, including increasingly allowing the bulldozing of existing building stock (some of it historical in nature) and the literal scouring of lots (removing any vestige of carbon-sequestering soils, bushes, and trees, etc.), while at the same time, claiming she cares about dealing with Climate Catastrophe. And she has done *nothing* to discourage unbridled overpopulation growth in the region, past its ecological carrying capacity.

She and council have allowed the homeless population to increase while ineffectively dumping money into the vortex of a black hole with no clear strategy to reverse the plight of the homeless. She has also encouraged densification, which does *not* address housing affordability.

Council has allowed traffic to appreciably increase, while dilly-dallying on expediting a 30-year-overdue mass transit and regional transportation strategy. They have encouraged the development of very costly bike lanes, but tolerated many design flaws which increase, not decrease, safety issues!

Victoria, like almost all municipalities across Canada, keeps increasing its property taxes at rates above the cost of inflation, an increasingly unsustainable situation, in financial terms.

Our Victoria council never seem to learn from their avoidable mistakes when it comes to tackling significant projects, which *always* run well behind schedule and well over budget. The city's adherence to tried-and-tested project management tools and processes is abysmal!

Victoria council keeps cost-ineffectively growing its bureaucracy, increasing staff, and acquiring capital assets (including pieces of equipment with low utilization rates). The bureaucracy is peppered with "communications officers." The organization is top-heavy, with far too many managers in relation to non-management staff.

In the three-plus decades I have lived in Victoria, municipal salaries of both bureaucrats and politicians have increased appreciably. As well, Victoria councillors collect their basic salary and then most featherbed it with the remuneration they receive from participating on various CRD committees. The net result is an undeservedly high remuneration package in a bureaucracy which has become increasing non-accountable and non-transparent.

Providing "spin" and lots of wheel-spinning, rather than getting the job done, seem to be the major preoccupations of the day. It's time to clean house.

Brad Atchison

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An insurance policy against the failure of local climate action plans

DAVID BROADLAND

If history repeats itself, local plans to reduce GHG emissions will come up far short of targets. Shouldn't there be a Plan B?

PHOTO: DAVID BROADLAND

Focus editor Leslie Campbell admires a carbon sequestration facility on Quadra Island

Is the approach taken by Victoria and Saanich to reduce GHG emissions within their jurisdictions flawed in some fundamental way that guarantees little or no reduction?

This is a vital question to consider. Almost all local governments in the CRD have recently declared a "Climate Emergency," yet the best local example of a well-considered climate action plan—put in place ten years ago by Saanich—has produced only a small reduction in emissions. If the action plans local governments are creating are just more of the same approach Saanich has already tried—and they are—why would the result be any different?

In 2008, during a previous peak in public interest and concern about global climate change, the BC government introduced North America's first broad-based carbon tax. At the same time, the municipality of Saanich began drafting a plan to reduce territorial sector-based GHG emissions. By 2010, Saanich had launched its forward-thinking "Climate Action Plan." One of the plan's primary goals was an "at least 33 percent" reduction in territorial emissions from 2007 levels by 2020. Ten years later, how did that go?

Back in 2010, Saanich's Climate Action Plan put the municipality's 2007 sector-based territorial GHG emissions at 521,000 tonnes per year. What are they now? In 2019, after declaring a Climate Emergency, the municipality quickly developed the outline of a new climate action plan that plotted a pathway to reduce sector-based territorial emissions by 50 percent by 2030 and reach carbon neutrality by 2050. Saanich's new starting point, according to that outline, would be 512,900 tonnes. So nearly 10 years after launching its 2010 action plan, Saanich's sector-based territorial emissions are only 8,100 tonnes below 2007 levels. That works out to a 1.6 percent reduction, well within the uncertainty associated with the accuracy of the 2007 estimate of emissions. Why does Saanich now expect a different result on its second try using the same approach? Victoria is using the same methodology in its Climate Leadership Plan.

According to the climate action plans for both communities, all that residents need to do is summed up in three initiatives: First, property owners need to get rid of their oil and natural gas heating and hot water systems and buy electric heat pumps. Second, car

drivers need to switch to a bicycle, an electric bus, or an electric car. Third, Victoria and Saanich foresee the availability of "renewable natural gas," although it's uncertain where that will come from and how much such facilities would cost, both in dollars and embodied emissions. But residents should get ready to pay for it.

All of these provisions require new consumption: of electric cars and bicycles, new heating systems, new infrastructure to create biogas, and probably new offices to house a growing contingent of Climate Emergency managers. We just need to buy our way to lower emissions.

While the experience of Saanich's 10-year-long unsuccessful attempt at lowering emissions should provide local governments with ample warning that it's far easier to plot reductions on paper than to achieve them in the real world, there are other reasons to doubt substantial reductions will ever materialize.

One example: neither community has any intention of constraining population growth or the gentrification of existing neighbourhoods. Thus, we will continue to see, as long as the Canadian economy is growing, new buildings and infrastructure created to service a growing population, and neighbourhoods becoming increasingly affluent and filled with bigger, more luxurious homes. Such growth comes with immense embodied emissions, and some of what's being created right now is surprisingly energy-inefficient.

In the City of Victoria, much of the growth is in the form of concrete and glass condominium highrises in the Downtown core. While emissions reduction planners might think that such modern buildings will be energy efficient, BC Hydro doesn't. In *High-Powered Highrise*, a report released earlier this year, Hydro noted: "Despite the suites in newer high-rise buildings often being marketed as energy-efficient and including things like LED lighting and Energy Star® appliances, the combined electricity usage of the overall building is approximately two times more than high-rises built in the 1980s, and almost four times more than low-rise buildings built that same decade."

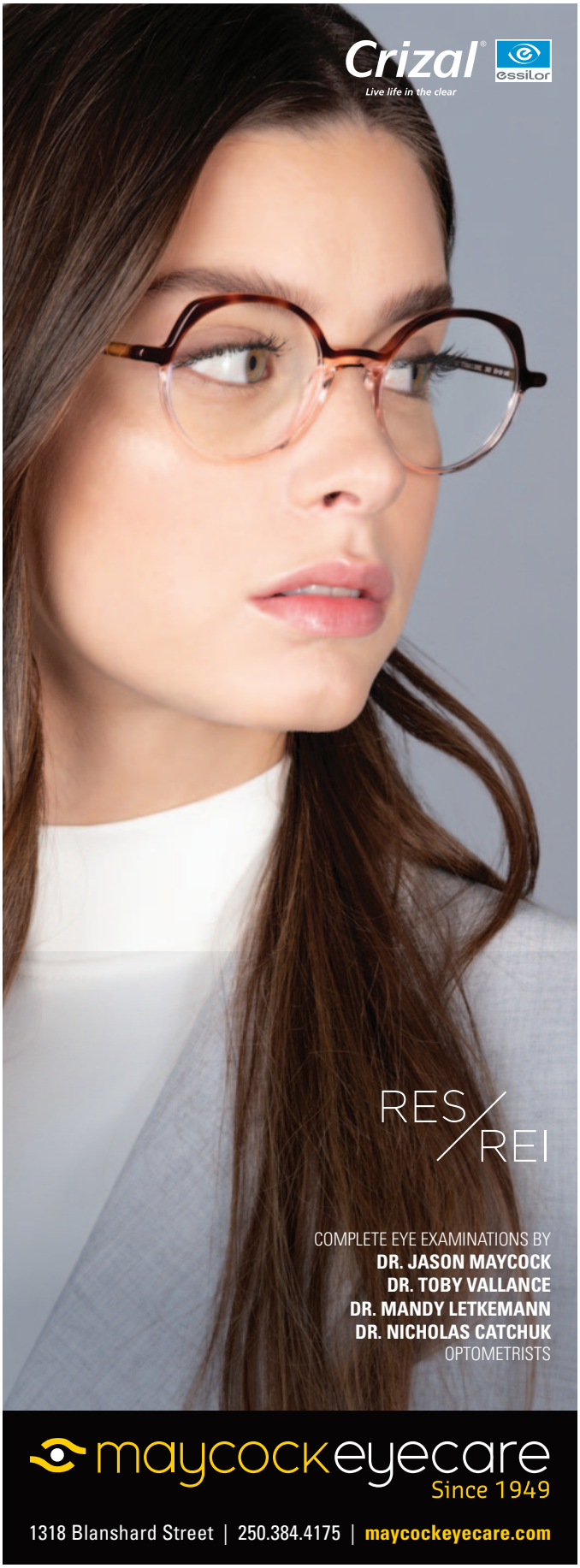
Why? According to BC Hydro, "This increase can largely be attributed to these newer, high-rise condo buildings (those with five stories or more) being equipped with high consuming luxury amenities, including pools, hot tubs, party rooms and fitness centres."

The strong desire for a luxurious home is also evident in many new low-rise multi-unit buildings in Victoria and Saanich. The market for luxury, it turns out, is a far more powerful determinant of what gets built than concerns about energy efficiency or carbon emissions, even in the midst of a Climate Emergency.

The relentless demolition of perfectly useable smaller, older homes, which are then replaced with high-end single-family homes two or three times the size, doesn't support the Climate Emergency managers' expectation, which underpins their emission-reduction targets, that consumers of housing are seriously concerned about either energy or material conservation.

The absence of any measures in their climate action plans to constrain population increase and physical growth in Victoria and Saanich isn't the only reason to doubt real reductions in carbon emissions will be achieved.

The most serious problem with both action plans is that they only address a small fraction of the emissions that Victoria and Saanich create, or cause to be released somewhere else.



CIVIC GOVERNMENTS COUNT their emissions using what is known as "sector-based territorial emissions accounting." In developing their climate action plans, both Saanich and Victoria have identified emissions created by the burning of fossil fuels, or the release of methane, within their boundaries using four sector-based GHG inventories: transportation (automobiles and buses), stationary energy (which includes, for example, all energy related to buildings), industrial products and processes (for example the City's asphalt plant) and waste (solid waste, sewage, composting). Both Saanich and Victoria are acting in accordance with what is known as the Global Protocol for Community-Scale Greenhouse Gas Emission Inventories (GPC) and their methodology aligns with the guidelines of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Using this protocol, Victoria identified 387,694 tonnes of territorial carbon emissions; as mentioned above, Saanich estimated 512,900 tonnes. The two communities' analyses of territorial emissions yield similar per capita levels: 4.52 tonnes per person in Victoria and 4.8 tonnes per person in Saanich.

Both these numbers, though, are far lower than the known per capita emissions of Canadians, which were 19.6 tonnes per person in 2017.

Saanich and Victoria, then, have set their sights on addressing less than 25 percent of our known per capita emissions. Where do the other 75 percent of Canada's per capita emissions come from?

About 26 percent of emissions come from the oil and gas industries, releases that occur before their end-products reach consumers. Another 10 percent comes from heavy industry (fertilizers, iron and steel, cement, aluminum, and pulp and paper). The vast majority of the remaining 64 percent of emissions are created by the production and use of housing, transportation, and goods and services consumed by Canadians in their daily lives. Because 85 percent of Canadians live in cities, most of this consumption occurs in urban centres like Victoria. So cities, and how their governments approach emissions reduction, will have a large impact on whether Canada's response to the Climate Emergency is effective or not.

It's only been in the last couple of years that comprehensive attempts have been made to quantify all the carbon emissions that human activity in cities creates directly or causes to be released elsewhere. Research done by the international organization C40 Cities provides some valuable insight. C40 Cities describes itself as "a network of the world's megacities committed to addressing climate change." Its board includes such climate luminaries as former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and current Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo. Vancouver is participating in the initiative.

C40 Cities has developed an alternative emissions accounting approach that focuses on the consumption of goods and services by residents of a city. In this approach, GHG emissions are reported by consumption category rather than GHG emission source category.

The 12 categories of consumption C40 Cities uses (and the percentage each category adds to emissions in a North American city) are: capital (15.3 percent); utilities and housing (26 percent); food, beverage and tobacco (7 percent); public transport (10.2 percent); private transport (7.3 percent); government (9.5 percent); clothing, furnishing and household equipment (8.8 percent); restaurants, hotels, recreation and culture (7.2 percent); communications (2.7 percent); education and health (3 percent); miscellaneous goods and services (1 percent); and "other" (2 percent).

A C40 Cities study, released in March 2018, noted that "consumption-based GHG emissions of C40 cities are significant, and significantly larger than sector-based GHG emissions established using the GPC."

How much larger? The C40 study found that "16 cities, mostly in Europe and North America, have consumption-based GHG emissions at least three times the size of their sector-based GHG emissions."

Although Victoria and Saanich weren't part of this study, it's not unreasonable to surmise that consumption-based emissions here are also "at least three times the size" of the sector-based emissions used by Victoria and Saanich in their climate action plans. It should be noted that Saanich commissioned a study of its 2015 consumption-based emissions. That report was released in 2018. It concluded that consumption-based emissions were two times higher than emissions based on sector-based accounting. The study did not include several of the categories C40 Cities uses, including "government services."

Let me give you just a few examples of emissions not counted by Victoria or Saanich in their sector-based territorial accounting that would be counted in consumption-based accounting.

Emissions associated with the cement used in concrete for constructing buildings, foundations, sidewalks, retaining walls, overpasses, etc, are not counted because the cement is manufactured elsewhere. So, too, is the steel rebar used to reinforce this concrete. Saanich has an aggregate mine that provides the sand and gravel used in concrete, but Victoria doesn't. Thus no emissions related to producing and transporting the ingredients of the concrete in Victoria's downtown highrise boom are included in its territorial accounting of emissions.

Another example is "government services." While both Victoria and Saanich do count GHG emissions caused directly by the burning of fuels resulting from their own operations, they don't include the carbon emissions embodied in the more than $500 million in funding the two governments collect each year from residential, institutional and business taxpayers.

There are no lumber or plywood mills in Victoria or Saanich, so none of the emissions or loss of forest carbon sinks associated with the forest industry and its products are included in municipal accounts of emissions, even though these products are essential for the physical growth and maintenance of our homes, hospitals, schools, and places of business.

Nor do Saanich or Victoria count the emissions created when their residents fly, for business or pleasure, to Vancouver, Paris—or wherever.

Although a small amount of the food we consume is grown here, most is grown elsewhere and transported to the island. Virtually none of the emissions embodied in our food is counted by Victoria or Saanich. Missing from their tallies, too, are the emissions embodied in the cellphones, computers, flat-screen TVs and other electronic devices manufactured elsewhere but consumed widely by Victoria businesses, institutions and households.

I won't go on. You get the idea. In Saanich and Victoria, Climate Emergency managers are counting only a small fraction of the GHG emissions that households, businesses, institutions and governments here are actually causing, directly or indirectly, to be released into the atmosphere. Using C40 Cities' "at least three times" multiplier, a more realistic estimate of the City of Victoria's emissions would be 1.2 megatonnes per year. Let's put Saanich down for 1.5 megatonnes.

Obviously, local climate action plans will have no success at reducing emissions that they're not even acknowledging or targetting.

IS THERE A DIFFERENT COURSE OF ACTION that municipal governments could take to mitigate their emissions? Yes, there is. In a written response to Saanich council's declaration of a Climate Emergency, Manager of Sustainability Ting Pan noted there were two ways to achieve carbon neutrality. The first was to eliminate carbon

emissions completely. The second was to "balance carbon emissions with carbon removal."

By "carbon removal," Pan meant the sequestration of carbon by trees. The simplest form of this approach to mitigate emissions, known as "offsets," is available to a person making a trip by airplane. Payment of an additional small fee—which, the offsetting company promises, will go towards planting a seedling somewhere on the planet—helps to expunge feelings of guilt and shame that some people experience when boarding an airplane. But this form of offsetting has been widely criticized, and rightly so. Forest scientists tell us, for example, that it takes about 17 years after a coastal BC clearcut has been replanted (which is often delayed several years after harvesting) to switch from being a source of carbon emissions to being a carbon sink. So offsetters that promise to plant a tree to mitigate emissions from, say, your flight to Stuttgart or Calgary, have no immediate effect on reducing atmospheric carbon. Moreover, if trees planted for offsets are cut down in 30 or 40 years, and that low-quality juvenile wood is then used for some short-lived product like shipping pallets or pulp for paper or biofuel, most of the carbon that tree stored is quickly released to the atmosphere. But there's another possibility for using carbon removal, and this would be similar to that developed for the Great Bear Rainforest, which protects mainly old-growth forest.

If second-growth trees on the south coast of British Columbia that are slated to be logged (and all Crown land currently under forestry tenures is slated to be logged, eventually) were left to grow, they would sequester more and more carbon each year for a few hundred years. If they were left until they get very old—a Douglas-fir tree, for example, can reach 1000 years of age or more—they would sequester large amounts of carbon over long periods of time.

Saanich's Ting Pan put the current cost of offsets at $25 per tonne. At that rate, to offset Saanich's estimated 1.5 megatonnes of consumption-based emissions for a year would cost about $38 million, and Victoria's 1.2 megatonnes would cost $30 million a year.

Ting Pan noted that, while "carbon removal" was "theoretically possible," there is "no known precedence of any Canadian municipalities taking this approach to become a carbon neutral community." She added that such offsets "will have to be generated outside of Saanich's municipal boundary…and would likely contribute to global emissions reduction. However, purchasing offsets have limited direct benefits to local residents, businesses or the local environments."

That last statement is ironic, and I'll explain the irony later. But the only alternative to a "carbon removal" approach is to repeat the actions Saanich took starting in 2010—an approach that hasn't proven effective and addresses only a third or less of the actual emissions it should. It seems doomed to fail. In a Climate Emergency, shouldn't our governments be trying out different options to see what works best?

THE RISK THAT CIVIC CLIMATE ACTION PLANS will fail to deliver significant reductions in community-based emissions demands a Plan B for insurance.

Certain species of trees, like Douglas fir, Western red cedar and Sitka spruce, can store atmospheric carbon for several hundred, even thousands of years. Forest scientists tell us that coastal old-growth forests store from 750 to 1130 tonnes of carbon per hectare, all absorbed from the atmosphere over the centuries. Our coastal rainforests can contain twice as much carbon per hectare as tropical rainforests like those in the Amazon jungle.

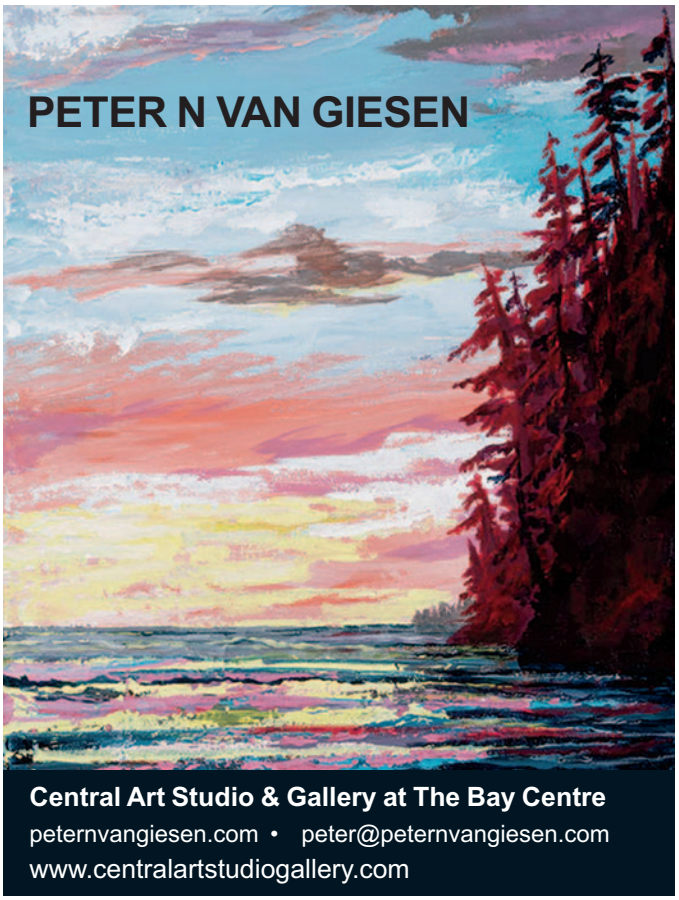


PHOTO: DAVID BROADLAND

Second-growth forests on Crown land like those on Sonora Island (left) and Maurelle Island (right) are slated for clear-cutting. Municipal governments could conserve these areas' biodiversity, tourism potential, and carbon sequestration capacity by paying fees to offset their own communities' GHG emissions.

While old-growth forests around the Salish Sea are becoming increasingly rare, second-growth forests that have a high percentage of Douglas fir, with trees up to 80 years old, are, by comparison, widespread. Select areas of the coast that measure high for biodiversity, tourism and recreation potential, and have the capacity for growing large Douglas fir, cedar or Sitka spruce, could be set aside and managed for optimal carbon sequestration. This wouldn't mean an end to forestry jobs in these selected areas, but clear-cut logging would end. This approach is already being employed with old growth in the Great Bear Rainforest by the First-Nations-operated Great Bear Carbon Credit Corporation.

The Crown-owned second-growth forests around the Salish Sea could absorb many millions of tonnes of carbon from the atmosphere and store that carbon for several hundred years. But they are being clear-cut at an unsustainably high rate, and their potential for storing carbon is rapidly being lost. Tragically, these second-growth forests are being harvested at an age when they are just beginning to absorb carbon at the highest rate per year, a pace that would continue for another 100 to 200 years if left to grow. Through a combination of government shortsightedness and mechanized-forestry corporate greed, BC is losing one of the most effective tools available on the planet for removing carbon from the atmosphere. Some of the loss is justifiable to the extent that lumber is necessary for building housing in BC. A substantial portion of that loss, however, is being exported as raw logs, which provides minimal economic benefit for coastal residents.

Ironically, most of the rapid liquidation of both old-growth and second-growth forests on Vancouver Island and the northern Gulf Islands is being carried out by TimberWest and Island Timberlands, both of which are owned, to a large extent, by public service pension funds that provide many former government (federal, provincial and municipal) employees with good pensions. Many of these former civil servants have retired to the Victoria area. The community benefits greatly by their presence here, but some of that economic benefit has come at the cost of widespread environmental damage caused by logging of both old-growth and second-growth forests. The south coast is not just losing the potential for carbon sequestration; logging-road construction and clearcutting are blasting, filling and shredding wildlife habitat, diminishing biodiversity and the land's ability to store water.

Can municipal governments step forward and preserve carbon sinks as an insurance policy against the potential failure of their climate action plans to perform as needed?

Saanich's Ting Pan, as noted above, wrote that, "purchasing offsets have limited direct benefits to local residents, businesses or the local environments." The irony in that assessment is that local residents and businesses have already benefitted—through money that has flowed into this community from those public service pension plans and increased government revenues—from the destruction of forest-based carbon sinks that is occurring all around the Salish Sea.

HOW MIGHT THE COST of protecting the remaining old growth and selected areas of second growth be charged against consumption-based emissions in communities like Victoria and Saanich? Households would pay a fee, based on household income, to municipal governments. Municipalities would transfer that money to the Province. The Province would then allocate funds to those affected resource communities selected for

carbon sequestration projects to transition them away from timber extraction on Crown land and towards carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, and development of tourism/recreation/research infrastructure.

Why should Saanich and Victoria collect carbon sequestration fees based on household income? A new scientific study on consumption-based household GHG emissions provides evidence for what most people already know: The greater the household income, the higher its consumption-based emissions. This peer-reviewed research quantifies the substantial difference in emissions between low-income and high-income households in the US. Canadians and Americans have very similar per capita GHG emissions, so the data from this new study is useful in Canada. The numbers suggest that Canadian households with incomes of $150,000 have consumption-based annual emissions of about 56 tonnes; a household income of $100,000 produces 50 tonnes; $60,000 in household income produces 33 tonnes; and $30,000 in income produces 22 tonnes. At Tang's estimate of $25 per tonne to offset emissions, a household with $60,000 in income would pay an annual emissions offset fee of $825. A household with $150,000 in income would pay $1400.

If Victoria's or Saanich's Climate Emergency managers could prove that their action plans had reduced community emissions by, say, five percent, then their residents' fees could be reduced by five percent, or whatever reduction had been achieved. If emissions go up, the fees go up, and more forest land is converted to carbon reserve.

As Saanich's Ting Pan noted, "there is no known precedence of any Canadian municipalities taking this approach to become a carbon neutral community." There's also no known example in Canada of a municipal climate action plan producing significant emission reductions. Such plans are often branded to include the word "leadership." Victoria has called its plan the "Climate Leadership Plan." But can following a path that's known to badly underestimate actual emissions, and which uses an approach that has already proven itself to be ineffective, be regarded as "leadership"?

David Broadland is the publisher of *Focus*. He is working with a group of scientists, journalists and citizens to explore the potential for conserving selected BC forests for carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation and short-distance tourism potential.

Focus presents: Tom Watson, Odlum Brown Limited ADVERTISEMENT

Aligning your investments with your values

An avid environmentalist and financial advisor for 30 years, Tom Watson 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.

Tom has been keeping track of how well his solar panels are working. This year so far they produced 3.39 megawatt hours and saved the equivalent of 2,955 lbs of carbon. In the fall, of course, it falls off because of the lower light levels and a nearby forest. "I am willing to generate less power, to help keep that forest preserved," says Tom. But he's sold on solar and will add more panels in the future. Double walls and radiant heated concrete floors help keep his home's carbon footprint low, as well. "It is a very efficient and passive house," says Tom, adding, "I live what I preach and I invest the same way—and find it actually works."

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."

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.

"I continue to purchase equities that fit in the ESG category, being environmentally conscious, socially responsible, and showing good governance." He also prefers corporations that regularly increase their dividends or distributions, and where possible local companies. "Investing capital can lead to a better world," he says, noting that buying good quality equities doesn't depend on good timing or the fluctuations of the market.

Walking the talk: Tom Watson has installed solar panels on his Langford home's roof

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 30 years of experience, and his Bachelor of Science degree in Economics and Psychology.

With a passion for ethical investing, Tom helps his clients live according to their own values, while maintaining financial security. Tom welcomes your call to learn more.

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twatson@odlumbrown.com

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Density on trial

ROSS CROCKFORD

Residents take the City of Victoria to court for overriding its Official Community Plan.

"I'm not an activist kind of guy," John Wells says. By day, he develops instrumentation for the high-tech sector. But this autumn, he put his name on a court action that could change how developments get approved by the City of Victoria, and potentially every other municipality in British Columbia. "I've never done anything like this before."

In his case, the development in question is Rhodo, a set of 20 townhomes planned for two residential lots at 1712 and 1720 Fairfield Road, next to Hollywood Park, in the Gonzales neighbourhood. Aryze Developments first presented the project to neighbours, including Wells, in 2017. Though Aryze generated many letters of support for the project through their website, attendees at community association land-use meetings were almost universally opposed, arguing that Rhodo packed too many people into too small an area, and its boxy modern design didn't fit the street.

Victoria's council approved Rhodo at a public hearing in August. A majority of speakers supported the project, and the majority of councillors (aside from Charlayne Thornton-Joe and Geoff Young) cited a need for diverse housing in the city and in Gonzales in particular, and claimed that increased density in a walkable area on a transit route would reduce climate change. But the neighbours didn't accept that reasoning. They got a lawyer's opinion that the City had overstepped its authority, rallied to launch a court case to set aside the council's decision, and Wells volunteered to become the face of the lawsuit.

The nub of their legal argument concerns the height of the development. BC's *Local Government Act* says that all bylaws passed by a council—such as the rezoning bylaw for Rhodo—"must be consistent with" the municipality's official community plan. In Victoria's Official Community Plan (OCP), Gonzales is designated "traditional residential," defined as consisting of "ground-oriented buildings up to two storeys" and multi-unit buildings up to three storeys on arterial roads. (Fairfield is designated a "collector" road.)

At the public hearing, Aryze and City staff said Rhodo was "2.5 storeys" tall. Wells says it's three. (The architect's plans say it's 11.14 metres tall, and the City's planning documents say residential construction between 9 and 12 metres equals three storeys.) "I deal with math a lot, and the equation for 'up to two storeys' is 'less than or equal to two,'". Wells says. "It's not 'around two.'"

City planners acknowledged the "up to two storeys" problem in their reports to councillors, but recommended Rhodo proceed anyway, noting that the OCP also contemplated a "range of built forms," that the "appropriate scale" of a building was to be based on "an evaluation of the context," and that the townhouses would advance the OCP's broad objectives of diverse, transit-accessible housing.

Wells isn't opposed to development; like any developer, he says, he just wants clear rules. That means the City needs to respect the clear terms in the OCP. As he points out, Victoria developed its OCP between 2009 and 2011 with the involvement of some 6,000 residents, and in 2012, council enshrined the plan in a bylaw. "With this [Rhodo] decision they crossed the line; they violated the public trust, which is what the OCP is," Wells says. "For me that's the nucleus of this complaint."

John Wells says the terms of the OCP constitute a public trust

To finance the lawsuit, Wells has raised over $10,000 from more than 75 donors via gofundme.com—and in the process, he's spoken with residents across Victoria who say they're fed up with the City cherry-picking phrases from its policies to justify oversized developments. "I realized this isn't isolated," he says. "This has been going on for quite some time."

IAN SUTHERLAND CAN SYMPATHIZE. As chair of the Downtown Residents' Association's land-use committee, he's been battling City Hall over developments since 2011, and he agrees the OCP should be strictly interpreted. "It's supposed to represent a contract between the council, the development community, and the citizens."

Trouble is, the City keeps rewriting the contract, and frequently amends the plan for projects all over town. In May, Sutherland persuaded all of Victoria's neighbourhood associations to add their names on a letter to Mayor Lisa Helps and council, calling on them and City staff to "follow best practices in land use planning by unequivocally upholding the Official Community Plan." The City's reply? "Zero. Not a peep," Sutherland says. "It's almost like they didn't understand what I was talking about."

Sutherland's current headache is the City's tendency to override the density provisions of the OCP. Density often gets described in floor-space ratios, but he says it's really about whether a development will help or hurt the liveability of an area. A particularly egregious example for him is the proposal to gut the 1892-built "Duck's Block" on Broad Street: the OCP says that historic part of downtown has a density limit of 3:1, but the planned hotel will have a density of nearly 5:1. "All those beautiful little courtyards and back alleys, they're part of a low-density culture that will be rubbed out, because these developments soak up every square inch of dirt."

Artist's rendering of the controversial Rhodo project

Sutherland's also been critical of the proposal for four towers at Cook and Johnson—one of which will include a new fire hall—noting that the project has an overall density of 6.8:1 in an area permitted only 5.5:1 in the OCP. At the project's public hearing on October 24, City planning staff said they looked at a "balance" of considerations, and that inconsistency with any one policy in the OCP wasn't enough to derail a proposal. Council agreed and approved the project—and in her comments, Mayor Helps said that she effectively considers parts of the OCP to be obsolete.

"One of the problems with the Official Community Plan, and the way that it's used sometimes, is that it's wielded as a shield against change," Helps told the audience. "And I don't think that's right." She was on an advisory committee for the OCP when it was being created, before she was first elected to council in 2011, and the OCP didn't identify the concerns Victoria faces today. "If we had declared a climate emergency, and been in the middle of a housing crisis when we approved the OCP in 2012, it probably would've looked like a very different document. So our responsibility now is to look at the reality around us, and amend the document accordingly as needed."

Wells' case is slightly different: for Rhodo, the City didn't even bother amending the OCP, which is a more complicated procedure under provincial law than rezoning, requiring a municipality to consult with "persons, organizations and authorities" that might be affected. Perhaps the City got lazy—or it passed on an OCP amendment for Rhodo because it's confident the law is on its side.

In its filed response to Wells' action, the City notes that the *Local Government Act* says an OCP is "a statement of objectives and policies," so the City considers it a "visionary" document that shouldn't be strictly interpreted. Some judges have agreed: in 2011, BC's Court of Appeal upheld Central Saanich's subdivision of the Vantreight farm into residential lots, saying its rezoning bylaw was consistent with the various environmental and social goals in the OCP, and that the council acted reasonably by weighing various factors in its decision. But other BC court decisions say an OCP is a legal document, and when it imposes clear requirements, those should be followed.

The case will probably be heard in mid-December. Regardless of the decision, though, the issues will soon be tried in the court of public opinion as well. Laurel Collins, one of the councillors who voted for Rhodo, is now off to Ottawa, and the City will hold a byelection for her seat early in the new year. Judging by Victoria's ongoing arguments over land use, neighbourhood-advocate candidates are sure to emerge.

Ross Crockford used to be a lawyer, but he's better now.

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First stop the dying

JUDITH LAVOIE

Experts agree that bold moves are essential to reducing the deaths from opioid use.

Some memories make David Clarke feel ashamed, such as stealing from family and friends when he was addicted to crack cocaine.

"I would do anything, anything to get it," says the 35-year-old Vancouver Island resident who switched from crack to heroin in an attempt to modify his behaviour—a shift that meant he changed to stealing from stores or dealing drugs to feed his habit. "I felt I had gained some morals," says Clarke.

However, like many others struggling with addiction, the switch to heroin put Clarke at increased risk of inadvertently taking fentanyl, which is found in most illicit opioids sold in BC. Some also actively seek out fentanyl after finding it offers a more intense high. Four years ago, Clarke overdosed on fentanyl and was brought back by a naloxone injection.

Leslie McBain

He was one of the lucky ones. The latest figures from the BC Coroners Service show that 690 people died in BC from illicit drug toxicity in the first eight months of 2019.

There is growing pressure to replace a poisoned supply of street drugs with a safe supply. Advocates also want decriminalization of small amounts of drugs for personal use, a move that would reduce the stigma and persuade more people to seek help.

Leslie McBain, co-founder of Moms Stop The Harm, a network of families who have lost members from drug use or have loved ones struggling with substance use, in common with institutions such as BC Coroners Office and BC Centre on Substance Use, believes that the urgent priority is to stop the deaths. Arguments that money should be put into enforcement and recovery, rather than a safe supply, ignore the realities of addiction, McBain says.

"A person who dies from a toxic drug supply will never go into recovery. People who don't understand the concept of safe supply also don't understand what addiction is and how people have to live their lives when they are addicted. People are forced to go to the toxic supply on the street. It's Russian roulette," she says.

Safe supply and decriminalization, although politically controversial, are far from fringe concepts.

The BC Centre on Substance Use (BCCSU) has issued a paper suggesting heroin compassion clubs be established, and Provincial Health Officer Dr Bonnie Henry has called for decriminalization, urging politicians to regard the overdose crisis as a public health issue, not a criminal justice matter.

Safe supply and decriminalization would keep people out of the justice system; public benefits would include a reduction in criminal activity and wresting control of the drug trade—and resultant money-laundering activities—from organized crime.

Coroners Service statistics show that fentanyl was detected in more than 85 percent of illicit drug toxicity deaths in 2018 and 2019. Carfentanil, an animal sedative many times more powerful than fentanyl, was found in more than 100 cases this year—an increase of 240 percent over the previous year.

Andy Watson, spokesperson for BC Coroners Service, says, "Sadly, fentanyl continues to be the main issue, leading to the existence of a toxic drug supply across British Columbia. In fact, four in every five illicit drug toxicity deaths in BC have fentanyl detected in the post-mortem testing." That's why the Coroner is advocating for access to safe supply: "If you provide a safe drug supply for people who use substance, there is less risk," says Watson.

The 690 deaths actually represent a 33 percent decrease over the 1,037 deaths in the same eight months last year, but it is not necessarily an indication that the opioid crisis is easing, notes former Provincial Health Officer Dr Perry Kendall, now interim co-executive director at the BC Centre on Substance Use. "If you look at the actual number of overdoses that are being attended, we are not seeing a drop in overdoses and we are not seeing a drop in the severity of overdoses. What you are seeing is that we are getting pretty good at pulling people back from an overdose," says Kendall.

Kendall acknowledges that a safe supply of drugs is not a cure-all, and must be combined with new programs to build resilience against drugs, particularly among young people, and better intervention, treatment and recovery systems. "But, if we don't stop people dying, there won't be people able to go into recovery. It's not one or the other," he says.

Watson also noted that harm reduction measures are partially responsible for the drop in the number of deaths. "If it was not for the treatment and harm reduction measures in place, we understand from our partners there would have been at least twice the number of deaths since 2016 when the public health emergency was declared," he says.

Among the most important of those harm reduction measures are supervised consumption and overdose prevention sites—there have been no deaths reported after more than 300,000 injections at such facilities. And more than 1,000 overdoses were reversed. Understandably, most advocates want to see such services expanded.

Victoria has seen 35 deaths so far this year, compared to 98 for the same period in 2018, but the City remains in the top three drug death communities in BC. Northern Vancouver Island has seen an increase in the number of deaths.

ADDICTION TO THE POWERFUL DRUGS is often fast and unanticipated. "Choice is only in the first few times. Addiction happens and then it's often no longer a choice for a person," says McBain.

And there is no easy way out.

Clarke has tried methadone and suboxone programs and spent time at Guthrie House Therapeutic Community at Nanaimo Correctional Centre and several other treatment and rehabilitation centres to try and quit his drug use—with no long-term success.

Jail time, sometimes with involuntary periods of cold turkey, taught him how to commit crimes such as credit card fraud, and put him in touch with groups involved in the drug trade. "I found new, innovative

> "THE PEOPLE IN POWER, who hold the purse strings, have not got the will or courage to make the really hard decisions, some of which are decriminalization and implementing safe supply."—*Leslie McBain, Moms Stop the Harm*

ways to get my fix," admits Clarke, whose drug use started after childhood abuse and family addiction problems.

Few people are likely to kick their addiction while in jail or while they are homeless, so new approaches are needed, says McBain, who also advocates for more harm-reduction services and increased help in homing people and addressing poverty.

Reverend Al Tysick of the Dandelion Society, who works with Victoria's most vulnerable population, cautions that, although decriminalization and safe supply would help, long-term solutions must prioritize housing, better access to mental health care, well-regulated treatment centres, and giving people on welfare sufficient money to live on. "We've tried to tackle it piece by piece and it hasn't solved the problem. We've never looked at it as a whole…It's a vast puzzle, and one piece of the puzzle cannot solve the issues we are facing," says Tysick, acknowledging that a multi-faceted approach would be extremely expensive. But, he adds, "I think we are wealthy enough to solve it."

Access to well-regulated, intense treatment centres is essential, says Martin (last name withheld), a 20-year-old who has been clean for 10 months after a downward spiral into drugs and crime that started in high school.

After several failed attempts, Martin checked in to a privately-run recovery home, based on the 12-step program, that counselled and mentored him 24 hours a day over nine months—in contrast to some government-funded recovery homes where treatment can be minimal, with no daytime supervision.

The only problem is cost, as most people cannot afford the treatment, says Martin, whose family has helped financially.

One of Clarke's biggest regrets is the effect on his family the night he overdosed on fentanyl, shortly after being released from jail, and was found on the floor of his family home by his niece.

"I thought all the kids had gone to bed and I decided to do fentanyl. I knew people were dying all over the place, but I didn't think anything of it. I went from sitting on a chair to being on the floor of the kitchen with all the kids surrounding me and crying. I could hear someone screaming," says Clarke, who was given naloxone by ambulance attendants.

Naloxone, which reverses the effect of overdoses from opioids such as heroin and fentanyl, has saved thousands of lives, and is another vital part of BC's harm-reduction strategies, with take-home kits widely distributed around the province.

For Clarke, that night proved that BC's harm-reduction policies are working. "I probably wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for harm reduction," he says.

However, like many others in BC, treatment options for Clarke have failed, and his worries about being returned to jail are sometimes overwhelming. Yet, as a continuing drug user, he remains at risk from a tainted drug supply.

In addition to the death toll, an increasing concern among first responders and medical professionals is the after-effects of naloxone, which can be followed by an overwhelming need to find another fix to avoid going into withdrawal.

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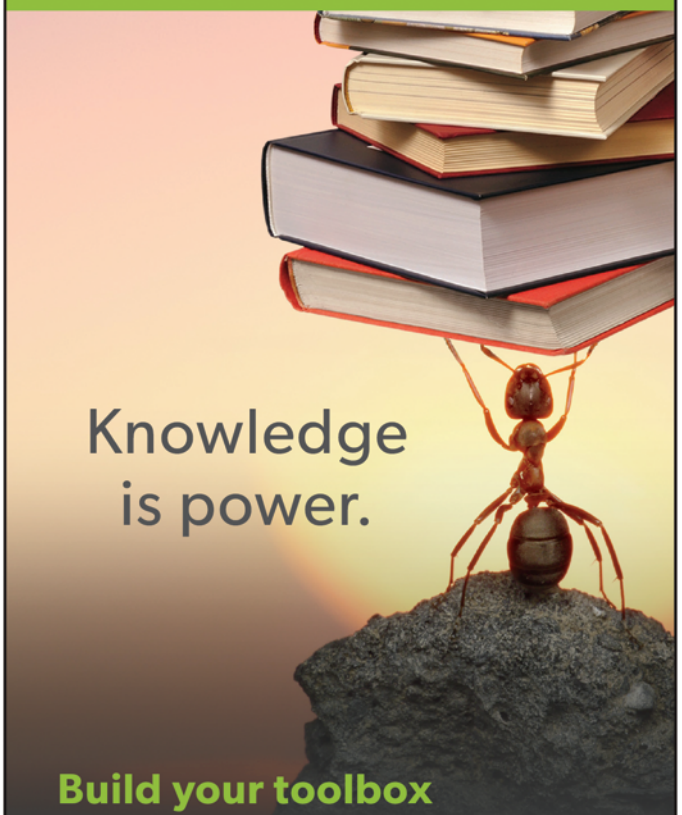

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"It's like, 'I almost died that time, but I needed another fix right now,'" says Clarke, who is continuing to use crystal meth and fentanyl, obtained from a dealer who he believes is providing safe doses. He then treats his anxiety with Ativan and Xanax.

ISLAND HEALTH CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER Dr Richard Stanwick worries that, combined with an upsurge in the use of crystal meth, which also affects the brain, long-term care facilities are going to be needed for people who have survived overdoses.

"Sometimes people are being brought back five times in a single day, which is not necessarily going to be good for your brain, because of episodes of oxygen starvation," Stanwick says. "There are some really disturbing trends. It's a very fluid drug scene."

Island Health walks a tightrope when it comes to innovative measures, as there are no government policies promoting safe supply or decriminalization. "But, on a trial basis, and under the auspices of the state of emergency, it does appear we are going to continue to look at alternative ways of saving lives," Stanwick says.

Dr Richard Stanwick

More than 3,000 individuals on Vancouver Island are receiving methadone or suboxone. And, under tight control, a new injectable pharmaceutical-grade opioid treatment for chronic, severe opioid addiction is being offered to some residents of Johnson Street Community at 844 Johnson. The twice-daily injections are offered to those who have not benefitted from options such as methadone. It is likely another Vancouver Island centre will open shortly.

Stanwick describes it as pushing the boundaries in an effort to save lives. "It is increasing our menu of options. It is life-saving because the risk out there is so severe, but…we're not giving out free drugs to anyone. That's the last thing anyone wants to do," he says.

Despite the success of supervised consumption sites, the latest statistics show that the majority of deaths occur in private residences, hotels or shelters, and that is a major concern, notes Stanwick.

"Somehow, we are still not breaking that stigma barrier where people are dying alone. It's so hard to figure out what to do," he admits.

Kendall points to the all-too-common attitude that people who abuse drugs are responsible for their own problems—and that it is a moral failing rather than a chronic health problem—lying at the root of the inadequate response to the situation.

DESPITE MORE THAN 12,800 OPIOID-RELATED DEATHS across Canada between January 2016 and March 2019, the issue has gained remarkably little political traction, although provision of harm-reduction services has required municipal, provincial and federal governments to work together. At times, health authorities in BC have pushed the limits legally to provide safe injection sites, such as when faced with opposition from former Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who unsuccessfully tried to shut down Vancouver's Insite.

BC declared a public health emergency in 2016, but the federal government has not followed suit. Decriminalization technically falls under federal laws, although enforcement varies widely in different communities, with *de facto* decriminalization already being practiced

in some communities. In Victoria, police rarely prosecute cases of minor drug possession.

The provincial government has said it cannot change the law, but Dr Henry noted in her "Stopping The Harm" report that the Province could amend the *Police Act* to achieve the objective. "This could include declaring a public health and harm-reduction approach as a provincial priority to guide law enforcement in decriminalizing and de-stigmatizing people who use drugs," says Henry's report.

Portugal, which adopted a decriminalization approach in 2001—switching simple drug possession from a criminal to an administrative offence—is held up as an example of how decriminalization can work, especially when linked to intensive treatment strategies and harm reduction. The strategy has resulted in more people seeking treatment, fewer deaths, and no increase in drug use.

Kendall says he would favour a similar system. "We decriminalize, and we find people who are at risk, and they would get an assessment by a physician or a nurse," Kendall suggests. "Then, if we had something similar to the Portuguese system, you could be offered a treatment program—whether for alcohol or stimulants or opioids or, if you were deemed to be at ongoing risk of death or brain damage from illegal drugs, you would be eligible to pick up a certain amount of pharmaceutical opioids," says Kendall.

In the hyper-heated political atmosphere of the recent federal election campaign, the Conservatives described decriminalization and adding more safe consumption sites as "terrible" ideas, while the Liberals promised more treatment services and an expansion of programs such as safe consumption sites, but avoided commitments to safe drug supply or decriminalization. The NDP supported decriminalization and expanded treatment options, while the Greens promised decriminalization and "access to a screened supply."

"It seems to be a political third rail for almost every party," says Kendall, speculating that the issue is too hot to touch politically.

McBain is exasperated that governments are failing to recognize the severity of the public health crisis. "The people in power, who hold the purse strings, have not got the will or courage to make the really hard decisions, some of which are decriminalization and implementing safe supply," she says. "We are in the middle of a wildfire and we do have access to water…The solutions are right in front of us and we can't access them," says McBain, who lost her only child, 25-year-old Jordan Miller, to an accidental opioid overdose five years ago after he became addicted to pain killers prescribed for a back injury.

The figures should speak for themselves when it comes to the need to stop the deaths, according to Kendall. Last year, 4,488 Canadians died from opioid overdoses—which translates into about one death every two hours. "A Boeing Max 737 carries about 220 people, and when two of those go down in the world, every Max 737 is grounded. Then look at the number of people that are dying in BC and Canada—it's planeloads," says Kendall, adding, "Stop the deaths, stop the brain damage. As a humanitarian, I think it has to come, unless we are content to continue to see this kind of damage happening. It's not just legalization, it's building an evidence-based accessible continuum of care that includes effective recovery as well as maintenance programs."

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

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The vanishing ancient forests of Vancouver Island

STEPHEN HUME

As they are logged, whole ecosystems disappear forever, along with their superior ability to sequester carbon.

PHOTO: DAVID BROADLAND

Old-growth Douglas fir on Vancouver Island

Gloom and silence lodged in my memory first. An occasional shaft of golden light lanced between immense trees. They towered like the columns of some ancient Greek temple. If there was a breeze in the foliage, its rustle was muffled by the dense canopy hundreds of feet above.

It was 1956. I was nine. My father had taken me on my first real hike into the back country.

The temple allusion seems apt. The only other times I would feel that sudden, deep-shaded sense of sacredness—imprinting itself for the first time upon the virgin sensibility that art critic Roger Shattuck has called "the innocent eye"—occurred years later. Then I stood in the vaulting nave of an 800-year-old cathedral. Its construction began about the same time those Island trees of childhood memory were seedlings, pushing their first roots down into the decaying bole of a fallen ancestor, repeating the endless pattern of regeneration that had recurred over ten or more of their unimaginably long generations.

The ancient forests of Vancouver Island are ancient, indeed. The south coast was one of the first places deglaciated at the end of the last ice age. Palaeobotanists studying plant pollen in lake-bottom mud discovered that more than 12,000 years ago, when most of what's now the province still slept beneath glaciers as deep as Mount Waddington, these forests were growing here.

On my first encounter with the ancient forest that once covered all of Vancouver Island, the trees seemed timeless, inexhaustible. And yet, that primeval forest, the living connection with our Palaeolithic origins in the natural world, was already in rapid retreat when my father took me to experience its miraculous, never-to-be-forgotten presence.

It is utterly astonishing to think that in my brief lifetime, less than 10 percent of the life span of one of those trees, that same primeval forest has almost vanished from Vancouver Island.

Seventy years ago, my father, now 96, was still hand-logging old growth west of Sooke with double-bitted axe and misery whip. "We thought it would never end," he recently said—sadly I thought.

But ending, it is.

"We're down to the guts and feathers now," laments Erik Pikkila, a forester at Ladysmith who is assembling the "big data" needed for accurate, detailed analysis of BC's practices and their consequences—what he calls "forgotten history"—both long and short term. "Here in BC we run forestry in a black box," he says. "We need a technological revolution. The Province has run away from inventories. We don't even know what is out there. If we don't know what's in the bank account, how do we manage that account sensibly going forward?"

A decade ago, the Liberal government's cost-cutting mania resulted in a savage downsizing of the Province's forest service. In 2010, a BC

> THE BEST TOOL WE HAVE against climate change is forests—but we have to let them get old. We have to plant a trillion trees but the catch is to let them get really old."—*forester Erik Pikkila*

auditor-general's report concluded that despite high-minded declarations about preserving ecological integrity, the Province was falling short of its goals.

"We should know where every tree is, where every log is at any given moment in the forestry cycle," Pikkila says. "This is how you achieve real efficiency and sustainability in forest management. It's how you eliminate waste. They can do this in Scandinavian logging. We can do it here."

"What is the state of the forest? We don't really know anymore. We have to do things differently."

One step might be, as the Province has done with threatened grizzly bears, to boldly declare an immediate moratorium on logging the remnants of the ancient forest until we can gather the best science to determine what we *should* preserve, what we *can* preserve, and what we *must* preserve. Where to start? Perhaps with all trees still standing that were here before Europeans arrived—say 300 years old.

The governments of Washington State and Canada, with the support of British Columbians, pledged more than $1 billion to attempt to save the iconic Southern Resident killer whales from extirpation. Yet BC not only tolerates, but enables and even encourages the killing of 500-year-old trees to manufacture disposable products.

Today, probably 85 percent of the original ancient forest that covered Vancouver Island has been mowed down and turned into toilet paper, newsprint, dimensional lumber and plywood—purportedly a sustainable use, although most construction lumber goes into landfills after 50 years, the usual lifespan of a building in our throw-away culture of planned obsolescence. Tattered remnants remain in the North Island's littoral zone and in a few parks and protected areas. Pockets survive in the most remote river valleys.

To fly the Island from Cape Scott to Greater Victoria is to witness a landscape modified almost beyond recognition on an industrial scale. Ten thousand-year-old ecosystems have been stripped and replaced with artificial plantations that are, themselves, already in some places being stripped for a second time in less than a century. Forestry is now agriculture. Loggers, their historic self-perceptions notwithstanding, have become well-paid farm hands.

Government, industry, academics and technicians reassure us that they can reconstruct ancient forests. Others don't think so.

"By treating 500 to 1,000-year-old forests as if they were a renewable resource, we are acting out a fiction and thereby making a grave mistake," wrote Peter Raven, then-director of the Missouri Botanical Garden, in a prescient forward to the book *Ancient Forests of the Pacific Northwest*.

"Once they have been removed from a particular area, the ancient forests…will never appear again, given the human activities in the contemporary world and their consequences," Raven wrote. "We not only kill the trees that are cut, but we annihilate the possibility of such trees for all time. No manifestation of the anthropomorphic causes of tree death could be more permanently fatal than this."

NOMINALLY, GOVERNMENT FOREST POLICY supports jobs and the economies of small forestry-based communities. But this,

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too, is a lie of self-deception. Government decoupled forest resources from workers and their communities a generation ago.

In 1980, says Natural Resources Canada, about 100,000—one in 10 BC workers—were employed in the forest sector. By 2018, Statistics Canada listed 18,600 as employed directly in forestry, logging and support. Over that 38 years, though, the annual allowable cut remained the same. So that 20 percent of the original work force—and the communities depending upon it—now cuts the same amount of wood. The wealth from that productivity gain did not go to workers. It went to government and corporate bottom lines.

Industry rationalizes liquidating old-growth forests on the fiction they are "over-mature." The real reason, however, isn't concern for the well-being of the forest, it's because, as Charles Little pointed out in his book *The Dying of the Trees*, "Plantation trees are worth only about one-tenth as much as the 500-year-old pre-Columbian veterans."

Ironically, liquidating what's left of old-growth forests merely accelerates the problem for forest-dependent workers and their communities. When the high-volume old wood runs out, the replacement feedstock can only be low-volume plantation wood of inferior quality. This warning isn't a radical idea cooked up by naive environmentalists. The *Vancouver Province* ran a major newspaper series more than 80 years ago warning about the coming "fall down" effect.

LOOKING DOWN FROM A LIGHT PLANE COCKPIT upon the patchwork quilt of clear-cuts, newly replanted cut blocks, immature growth, and the few protected areas and crannies too rugged to log, and you'd be forgiven for thinking the Island is being defaced by some disastrous case of disfiguring psoriasis.

Satellite mapping shows as shamelessly optimistic estimates that 15 percent of old-growth inventory in moderate-to-high-value forest remains intact. Image analysis shows what remains is about a third of that or less. Only about 10 percent of the biggest trees, the 1,000-year-old giants from river bottoms and lower elevations, still stand. So, 90 percent of the most majestic trees are already gone—flushed down your toilet; used to wrap fish and chips; used to make disposable forms during construction of steel and glass skyscrapers, and then discarded.

Break it down by actual ecosystems, and the picture is grimmer yet. Of low elevation coastal Douglas fir and the Douglas fir adapted to the Island's dry east coast rain shadow, only about one percent remains. For mountain hemlock in the very dry zone, about seven percent is left.

"This is crazy policy," Pikkila says. "Ecologically, we need to be leaving all those big trees. Between 60 and 80 years in the growth cycle of those trees, the volume of wood doubles. The bigger the tree, the greater the volume of wood, the more carbon captured from the atmosphere and sequestered for a thousand years." He adds, "The best tool we have against climate change is forests—but we have to let them get old. We have to plant a trillion trees, but the catch is to let them get really old." While vigorously growing young trees sequester atmospheric carbon, they have to grow for 500 years to match the carbon sequestered in old-growth veterans.

On a per-hectare basis, temperate old-growth rainforests in BC sequester better than twice the carbon in equivalent forested areas of the tropical Amazon basin, whose deforestation has been so much in the news of late. More than 1,000 metric tons of carbon is sequestered in one hectare of BC rain forest, compared to about 400 tons in the Amazon.

Ecologist Elliott Norse points out in a seminal study of the ancient forests of the Pacific Northwest that timber operations in old growth "release a huge pulse of carbon dioxide in the few years after logging."

PHOTO: TJ WATT

Ken Wu stands beside an old-growth Douglas fir on McLauglin Ridge

This doesn't square with the carbon budget targets bloviated by the NDP in the provincial legislature.

Based on the best current science, Ken Wu of the Endangered Ecosystems Alliance calls for a dramatic expansion of targets for protecting remaining old growth. The United Nations target is currently 17 percent. BC has achieved 15 percent. Wu says we need to go to at least 50 percent protection by 2030.

"To continue logging the last giants is akin to slaughtering the last herds of elephants or harpooning the last great whales," Wu has written. "It's unnecessary and unethical, given that second-growth forests dominate more than 80 percent of BC's productive forest lands and can be sustainably logged.

"Indeed," he continues, "the rest of the Western world is focused on logging 50- to 100-year-old second- or third-growth trees. BC is one of the very last jurisdictions on Earth that still supports the large-scale logging of 500-year-old trees. On Vancouver Island alone, about 10,000 hectares of productive old-growth forests are logged each year while only 8 percent of the original is protected."

As with cancer patients, it's easy to get drawn into a confused and confusing realm of contested statistics when it comes to evaluating survival rates, statistical probabilities, fretting over what the numbers actually mean—or if they mean anything. Yet for any lay person trying to sort out the facts, one thing is certain: government and industry

data have gaps, sometimes large ones, and whether by incompetence or designed obscurantism, it's opaque.

Spending an hour trying to extract intelligible data from the equivocating, jargon-laden labyrinth hosted by the Provincial Ministry of Forests feels like the same mind-numbing paralysis that follows sucking in a Freezie too fast.

Government, which is responsible for managing about 20 percent of timber sales (through BC Timber Sales), and industry, which has billions vested in business-as-usual, both argue that more old-growth forest has been protected than environmental groups acknowledge.

But Wu, a long-time campaigner for expanded old-growth protection, says the spin cycle has been cranked up to high for government and industry statistics.

He argues, for example, that provincial statistics mislead, because they include in protected old growth all the low commercial value forests growing on terrain so rugged it can't be logged; stunted forests in shore bogs; treeless high alpine zones of rock and snow. They lump together fundamentally different ecosystems, from temperate coastal rainforest to arid rain shadow.

Wu likens this greenwashing of provincial forest policy to a politician combining Vancouver's impoverished Downtown East Side, where the median household income was $13,000 in the last census, with West Vancouver, where the median family income was $90,000, and then huffing that everyone, including those in the Downtown East Side, is doing just fine because median household income averages $50,000. Well, it does, but it's misleading.

Furthermore, he argues, if you include protected parklands in your annual old-growth inventory, the proportion of protected to unprotected old growth will appear to increase as unprotected old growth is logged. Eventually, when you've liquidated all the unprotected old growth, you'll be able to claim that 100 percent of your old growth is protected, although it will represent only a minuscule fragment of what was once present.

The fact is that at least 80 percent of the moderate-to-high-value forest—those are the big trees—has already been extirpated on Vancouver Island, Wu says. Another 15 percent is unprotected. Only about five percent is protected by parks or ecological reserves. So, the NDP government's plan, inherited from the opposition Liberals, appears to be to adopt a legacy of having stripped 95 percent of our ancient forest from the landscape, all the while congratulating itself on its environmental commitment.

Vicky Husband, another battle-scarred veteran of the fight to save what's left of a vanishing ecosystem, concurs.

"Our ancient, old-growth forest of giant tree ecosystems is seriously endangered and irreplaceable," she says. "Less than 15 percent of the original extent of ancient forest remains. There is very little valley-bottom ancient forest. Most [of what does remain] is seriously fragmented across the landscape by rampant clear-cut logging, with no regard for protection of other values."

She observes that the temperate coastal rain forests never amounted to more than about 0.5 percent of the world's original forest and yet it's still being logged to near extirpation. "The kind of extreme mismanagement and liquidation of the last of our ancient forests is a total crime against nature. We have the best remaining ancient temperate rainforests in the world, and we are losing them so fast," she says.

Continuing, Husband says, "We have protected only 5.5 percent of the original extent of the ancient forest on Vancouver Island. Does anyone think that is enough? The NDP has totally betrayed us all. They

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PHOTO: TJ WATT

A typical clear cut with grapple-yarder that hauls bucked logs up to the cold deck where they are sorted into truckloads. When dragged logs disturb the surface of the forest floor they can create furrows that channel winter runoff down steep slopes, contributing to erosion.

have continued the Liberal regime with regard to mismanagement of our forest, no consideration or protection of other important values, only timber.…and they are massively overcutting what we have left as fast as they can."

MORE THAN 60 YEARS AGO, when my father hiked me up into the old growth, it covered the lower slopes of Mount Arrowsmith, flanked the Cameron River where it winds from Labour Day Lake under Mount Moriarty, and swept over to Cameron Lake.

He showed me liquorice ferns, deer ferns, maidenhair ferns—a whole palette of vivid greens—offset by the pale, corpse-coloured ghost pipes that live in parasitical symbiosis with living tree roots.

Another persistent recollection, embedded like a kind of muscle memory, is the springiness underfoot. Moss that seemed knee-deep in places moved beneath my feet like a trampoline, although it was a more fragile kind of trembling.

We looked at nurse logs, huge trunks of ancient trees that had died, stood for another century or so, then fallen to the forest floor to begin a new cycle of growth. The moss, explained my dad, was so deep that nothing could take root, and the canopy so dense that there was little light. But these falling giants laid down a nutrient-rich bed into which seedlings had a brief window in which to push tiny roots into crevices and capture light slanting in through the opening left in the canopy.

We gorged on the fat, red huckleberries that take root in decaying stumps and took home a couple of cups, which my mother tossed with lemon juice, some sugar and promptly baked into a tart, tangy pie—another indelible childhood memory.

As we climbed towards the tree line, spring-fed rills bubbled up and frothed down the slope, tumbling over deadfalls and rock ledges. It was a landscape as magical and mesmerizing as any I'd found in the books at the tiny Port Alberni library where I was often deposited while my mother shopped.

Timespans are different in childhood. Summers seem so long that their end is always a shock. But it was nothing like the shock when I went looking for that vividly remembered ancient forest of childhood. It was a ruin of debris.

All that remains of that forest of my memory is the beautiful but ecologically insignificant postage-stamp park called Cathedral Grove, a thin ribbon of trees in the steep canyon of the Cameron River, and a few veterans here and there left to blow down in some big storm.

Provincial forest policy, and the attitudes of our elected politicians, seem maddeningly obtuse. The forest sector supports fewer and fewer people who are used to mow down the last intact bits of unprotected old growth at a time when children are taking to the streets demanding that we do something to preserve their future and their heritage.

BC's parks recorded 200 million visits over the last decade. Pacific Rim National Park Reserve gets about a million visitors a year. If hikers continue to reserve places on the West Coast Trail at the current rate, 75,000 will complete the arduous wilderness trek over the next decade.

PHOTO: TJ WATT

Logging in old growth on McLaughlin Ridge. Only about 5 percent of ancient forest is protected.

Government brochures, reports, and websites celebrate and promote these visits because they inject billions into the provincial economy—certainly more than logging does. The promotions are plastered with dramatic photos of pristine forests, hikers gazing at huge trees, and campers setting up in a pastoral paradise.

But it's really more of the Big Lie to which our children object. Beyond the park boundaries—and parks are now so jammed that reservations months in advance are a necessity—the landscape is still being shaved bald.

Stephen Hume spent half a century as a journalist writing about Western Canada, the Far North, BC and the Island. His byline has appeared in most major Canadian newspapers. The author of nine books of poetry, natural history, history and literary essays, he lives on the Saanich Peninsula.

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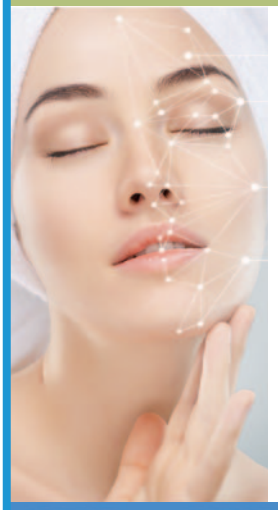

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Let the herring live

BRIONY PENN

West Coast wildlife depends on herring—and there's a model for bringing them back to the Salish Sea.

Herring spawn off the south end of Denman Island (Photo courtesy Jake Berman)

The wildlife in Spiller Channel, just north of Bella Bella, is alive and well this fall. Over a thousand bald eagles on their southward migration were feeding on the returns of chum and pink salmon alongside other top predators—black bear, grizzly and wolf. Sea lions, Dall's porpoise, several humpbacks and northern resident killer whales worked the channel edges.

At the entrance, where the breakers roll in, sea otters have returned, triggering a rebound of kelp forests. Juvenile fish are surviving better in these underwater nurseries. Overwintering sea ducks, like harlequins and surf scoters, fished alongside 500 Western grebes, listed as threatened. Along the channel, small buoys and lines tied to trees mark the traditional non-kill fishery of herring roe of the Heiltsuk First Nation. The foundation for the health and well-being of everyone in Spiller is herring; Spiller Channel is famous for them.

Spiller is also famous for the Heiltsuk Nation's prolonged stand-offs against the commercial "kill" herring fishery (which mostly is used for fish farm feed and pet food). It is an important place—a coastal Standing Rock—where the nation has stood up to pressures that push species and cultures to the brink: overharvesting, overhunting, overfishing and overlogging. Spiller is also close to where the Nathan E. Stewart oil spill occurred in Seaforth Channel in 2016, for which the nation launched their own emergency response.

With their success in stopping the commercial "kill" fishery, the trophy hunts, and commercial logging, along with winning the court case against the Texas Kirby Corporation responsible for the fuel spill, the Heiltsuk have set a course for how to bring life back to the land, the sea and the culture, with herring as the foundation. They have shown the way that abundance can return here too, in the Salish Sea.

All around the Salish Sea there are Spiller Channels waiting to rebound; bays where the open ocean has been calmed by the geography of granite and forests of kelp. People have tended these fish for millennia as they return year after year to spawn on the lush eelgrass meadows. The young fish follow the older fish back to a spawning site (what elders refer to as the scouts) and typically remain loyal to that site.

The Salish Sea had dozens of spawning bays with different spawning windows from Ganges SYOWT, the first place the herring come in spring, according to WSÁNEĆ hereditary chief Eric Pelkey, to the late spawners of Cherry Point near Bellingham. Some herring leave on their migration to the coastal shelf, some never leave, and with this mix of diversity of locations, timing and behaviours, the rest of the coastal community can thrive all the way up the food chain, through chinook to the Southern Resident killer whales and the human communities.

For many elders like Pelkey, whose chieftanship runs from STAUTW (Tsawout) on the Saanich Peninsula to SYOWT (Ganges) on Saltspring Island, the decimation of these herring stocks indicates a fundamental flaw with the fisheries model being used by Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). "It seemed like as soon as there was a sign that herring were starting to come back again and into Ganges Harbour, DFO would open it up commercially and seine boats would come in and just scoop them up. Eventually that just killed off that herring run." The fight that began with his grandfather, Louie Pelke, has been long and lonely—and repeated by every coastal nation.

In Lekwungen territory, the Gorge was their Spiller Channel until the commercial fisheries of the 1930s wiped them out. Ross Bay, James Bay and Ogden Point lost their herring to the reduction fisheries by 1938; Juan de Fuca in 1940, Hotham Sound and Redonda, pre-1950.

In WSÁNEĆ territory, Saanich Inlet, Coles Bay, Deep Cove, Patricia Bay, Goldstream and Finlayson Arm all lost their herring to the next wave of commercial fisheries of the '50s and '60s, and so it continued around the Salish Sea. Howe Sound, 1966; Malaspina Strait, 1975; Jervis Inlet, 1978; Fraser River, Bedwell Harbour, Campbell Bay, Lyall Harbour and Winter Harbour in 1979; Sechelt, Pender Harbour, Cowichan Bay, Ganges and Fulford Harbours, 1983; Powell River, 1988; Boundary Bay, 1992.

Some bays, like Nanoose and Yellowpoint, lost their spawns during the "wild west" herring bonanzas of the '80s, rebounding temporarily in the '90s, only to disappear again. These local extinctions usually followed the winter or spring fishery.

> "IT SEEMED LIKE AS SOON AS THERE WAS A SIGN that herring were starting to come back again and into Ganges Harbour, DFO would open it up commercially and seine boats would come in and just scoop them up. Eventually that just killed off that herring run."— *Louie Pelkey, hereditary chief, WSÁNE Nation*

In 2011, Simon Fraser University archeologist Dana Lepofsky started the Herring School forum, recording elders from Alaska to Washington who told of seiners coming into their bays at night, taking every last fish and silencing their spring.

Today, the only place that herring have continued to spawn at any scale is Baynes Sound around Hornby and Denman Island. Yet DFO persists in its claim that it has a workable model and a well-managed fisheries maintaining "historic levels." Few outside of DFO and industry seem to agree with the model, which is based on taking 20 percent of the total weight (biomass) of the fish predicted and comparing it to a baseline catch in 1951 to assess "historic highs."

Pelke lists its flaws: it treats all the herring in the Salish Sea as one big population; it targets bigger fish; it doesn't consider the ecosystem or cultural stewardship; it uses 1951 as a baseline which, as he points out, was a low point for herring during the excess of the reduction fisheries.

Even with an announcement this October from federal scientists that the model is predicting a decline of what they call the Strait of Georgia (SOG) population by one third, there is no move to end the winter or spring fisheries.

The WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council (WLC) of Tsartlip, Tseycum and Tsawout First Nations, like the Heiltsuk, are inviting others to join them in calling for changes. The WLC states that, "Herring have been under increased pressure from commercial fishing interests since the 1960s when herring populations reached a critical low. Since then, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) and Coastal First Nations, including the WSÁNEĆ, have been unable to agree on policies that prioritize the health of the herring population over commercial fishing interests."

Inspired by the Heiltsuk's successful lobbying efforts to have DFO agree to a moratorium on commercial herring fishery in places like Spiller, the WLC are cohosting an advocacy event this November called HELIT TTE SLON,ET (Let the Herring Live) with 25 local First Nations, and 50 community organizations invited. As the WLC state: "This is the first time in the Strait of Georgia's history that such a large and diverse group of interests have joined together to oppose the questionable practices of DFO." Part of the gathering will be hearing elders and independent researchers who have worked together for a decade in research forums providing the evidence to refute DFO's position. They will also explore case studies like the Heiltsuk for recovery efforts. Another historic first is that all political representatives of Saanich and the Gulf Islands from the Islands Trust up through Adam Olsen MLA and Elizabeth May MP are supporting this initiative.

Co-hosts like Conservancy Hornby Island, which gathered over 96,000 signatures to stop the herring fishery last spring, say DFO didn't listen to the decades of warnings, including the latest protests when stocks could have been left to recover. Director Grant Scott, an ex-commercial fisherman, states "it took a collapse of Strait of Georgia (SOG) herring to finally show up the flaw in DFO's modelling. To be precautionary, there should be no commercial herring fishery here until the populations of herring recover throughout the SOG, not just between Parksville and Comox." Like Scott, co-host Vanessa Minke-Marten, a fisheries scientist with Pacific Wild, is "supporting First Nations to assume their rightful control and place in herring management." That includes the integration of traditional and Western science for the full ecosystem: fish, sea birds, mammals, and cultures who rely on herring for their survival.

Management models that incorporate spatial population dynamics, it seems, are being used everywhere on the coast but here. When Washington State saw their 21 distinct spawning stocks, like Cherry Point, flicker out, they stopped the herring fisheries in the early 1980s. Lepofsky's archaeological evidence backed up elder testimonies prompting a call for changes in policy to align with Indigenous inherent and legal rights. The SFU work expanded into the Ocean Modelling Forum (OMF) in 2015 with 20-plus institutions, including a DFO researcher, joining First Nations in inter-disciplinary research. DFO has responded to calls for policy changes from the Heiltsuk, Haida, Nuu-chaal-nulth, and in small closures with the Q'ul-lhanumutsun Aquatic Resources Society (QARS).

With this sizeable body of evidence, researchers Andre Punt and his co-authors are unequivocal that the old model has "consequences throughout the social-ecological system, including loss of trust in management bodies and conflict..." Loss of trust is top-of-mind for co-host Lockhart MacLean of Sea Shepherd Conservation Society: "There is an issue here that DFO is whitewashing harvest rates based on fictional biomass. The 20 percent harvest rate is a joke with these wild predictions. DFO's lack of precaution is driving the last viable spawn in the Salish Sea to extinction."

Another research team under Daniel Okomoto recently found that managing stocks the way Pelkey advises, watershed by wateshed, "diversifies community benefits."

And the benefits need diversifying. The herring industry is controlled by one man, Jimmy Pattison, and all profits flow to his private empire which, according to *BC Business*, earned $10.6 billion in 2018, padded out by fuel subsidies for his seine boats. Pattison is counting on a reallocation of tonnage from the spring to the winter fishery which is supposed to start November 21.

The social licence doesn't appear to be on Pattison's side. Ocean Modelling Forum researchers have identified the variety of factors having impacts on herring, which range from pollution to climate change, but the unique threat, which only exists on the Canadian side of the Salish Sea (and is easily remedied), is the fishery; a fishery that is now proven to cause local extirpations.

The WSÁNEĆ response is CENENITEL, which means "helping one another to restore home." CENENITEL could look like a comprehensive herring recovery program that supports local nations and communities in recovery efforts to improve water quality and eelgrass, traditional reseeding of bays with herring roe, or assistance to displaced herring fishermen. Spiller Channel is returning, and the Salish Sea has one last chance to do the same.

Briony Penn is an award-winning writer of creative non-fiction books including *The Real Thing: The Natural History of Ian McTaggart Cowan*, *A Year on the Wild Side* and, to be released in the spring, *Following the Good River: The Life and Times of Wa'xaid, a biography with Cecil Paul* (Rocky Mountain Books).

Channelling Basil Fawlty: "DON'T MENTION LNG!"

RUSS FRANCIS

Some elephants in the LNG-room.

PHOTO: OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

BC Premier Horgan chats with Washington Governor Jay Inslee

Doubtless inspired by Greta Thunberg's electrifying September 23 United Nations speech, Premier John Horgan sprung into action. Before you could say "Climate crisis? What climate crisis?" on October 3, a mere 11 days later, the premier left the country. In Seattle, Horgan and Washington Governor Jay Inslee announced—wait for it!—a "Clean Grid" summit in 2020. No time, date or place mentioned.

In case some ill-mannered cynics questioned the value of the October meeting, the pair also "reaffirmed" their commitment to collaborate on the economy, environmental protection, and transportation. It's a little like a long-married couple reaffirming their marriage vows: A pleasant gesture, but having no legal or practical impact whatsoever.

The meeting was billed as part of the Pacific Coast Collaborative (PCC), an initiative launched in 2013 under Premier Gordon Campbell, linking BC with Washington State, Oregon and California—along with the cities of San Francisco, Seattle, Los Angeles, Portland, Oakland and Vancouver. The goal is to work together on the climate crisis.

Besides some cute graphics of electric cars and wind turbines, PCC's website currently boasts that since 2008, the region's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions have fallen by 6 percent. While that's better than two kicks in the bum, it's hardly enough to start fixing the planet by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's deadline of the end of 2020. But that decrease is for the entire region. And guess what happened to BC's emissions in the same period? According to the most recent GHG inventory, our emissions have recently been *growing*. In fact, though they did drop marginally over the nine-year period from 2008 to 2017, BC's 2017 GHG emissions, at 64.5 megatonnes (Mt) of CO_2 equivalent, were higher than in any year since that baseline year of 2008. BC spewed out 4.3 percent *more* GHGs in 2017 than in 2009, our carbon tax notwithstanding. Meanwhile, California and Oregon managed to cut their 2017 emissions by 13.0 percent and 5.5 percent respectively from 2008. (Washington has yet to report its 2016 or 2017 GHGs, though, like BC's, they grew in recent years.) No wonder BC loves the PCC: Thanks mostly to California, the region's overall emissions are headed in the right direction. BC, meanwhile, is that nasty cousin the others wish would fall into line or disappear.

The PCC's US members are going to have to do even better in the near future if they are to counter the highly toxic levels of GHGs that will result from LNG Canada's operations, estimated to begin in 2025. For example, at the October meeting, Inslee and Horgan each trotted out what they'd been up to recently. In Horgan's case, it was CleanBC, the December 2018 plan to reduce BC's GHG emissions. Even if fully implemented as proposed, CleanBC would reduce the province's annual emissions by a mere 18.9 Mt, with an additional 6.5 Mt reduction yet to come via unspecified methods. Using the BC government's own figures, GHG emissions from the plant alone will be 4.2 Mt, annually. Then there are the so-called upstream and midstream emissions, amounting to 2.7 Mt, for a total of 6.9 Mt of GHG emissions annually in BC as a result of LNG Canada. So to reach CleanBC's goals, BC will have to find an additional 13.4 Mt per year of GHG reductions from unknown sources, rather than just 6.5 Mt. Not an easy task, given that the province's emissions have been trending upwards. And these BC government estimates have been widely criticized as being far too low.

Governor Inslee parts ways with Horgan in several notable respects. For one, Washington has legislated a state-wide ban on fracking for oil and gas—the method currently used to produce virtually all of BC's natural gas, and the way that the extra gas to supply LNG Canada will be extracted. For another, in May 2019, Inslee announced he is opposed to a small Tacoma LNG plant, proposed by Puget Sound Energy. The project is tiny: It is intended only to supply trucks and boats, as well as provide extra natural gas supply during periods of peak demand. Not a drop for export. But Inslee, quite rightly, rejects the silly claims that LNG is a preferred replacement for other fossil fuels.

With close neighbours disagreeing so fundamentally about the seriousness of the climate crisis, surely discussions between the two concerning LNG must have been, well, interesting. In fact, the topic did not even arise, according to Inslee's acting communications director, Tara Lee, in an email. It didn't? It's not credible that neither leader knew of the other's position. But this meeting was plainly intended as a way of deflecting us plebes from the attention paid to Thunberg and subsequent actions of those she inspires. It wouldn't surprise me if Horgan's Chief of Staff, Geoff Meggs (who sat beside the premier during the meeting), discussed acceptable topics in advance with Inslee's Chief of Staff, David Postman (who likewise sat beside his boss). Perhaps inspired by Basil Fawlty, the pair may have mutually advised their respective leaders: *Don't mention LNG!*

DESPITE THE APPARENTLY DELIBERATE OMISSION of the topic from the Inslee-Horgan meeting, there is no shortage of developments at LNG Canada.

The traditional way of erecting a structure is to ship all the parts to the site, where they are assembled—a method known as "stick-built." But, as reported in the last *Focus*, the joint partners on the construction contract, Fluor (Texas-based) and JGC Holdings Corp (Japan-based), had a better idea: They are instead building much of LNG Canada's Kitimat plant at a huge fabrication yard in Zhuhai, China. The yard belongs to a joint venture between Fluor and a subsidiary of China

National Offshore Oil Corporation, entirely owned by the Chinese state.

Why use the yard? JGC handily summed up its motivation in a November 8, 2018 earnings release conference: "The use of modular construction for the entire facility and the use of larger modules are expected to cut the amount of on-site construction work by around 70 percent compared to conventional stick-built construction."

In JGC's 2018/19 annual report released October 4, 2019, the company provided more details on the supposed benefits of modular construction. Referring to the LNG Canada project, JGC Chief Operating Officer Tadashi Ishizuka said "our policy was to minimize local construction work, which we considered the greatest safeguard [against risk]."

I wonder if JGC first ran that inspired goal past Horgan, a labour-friendly politician who pushed the project in part by claiming it would create 10,000 construction jobs. Kitimat area residents would be given first dibs, followed by other British Columbians, then Canadians elsewhere. No mention of cheap Chinese labour. Must not have been room in the government's press releases.

If Horgan didn't want to talk about LNG in Seattle, one national leader does have something to say about the unloading of $7 billion-and-counting in BC and federal taxpayer funds on LNG Canada to create Chinese jobs. "They are just lining their pockets," says United Steelworkers national director Ken Neumann, speaking in an interview about the owners of the fabrication yard. As for donating public money to the Chinese cause: "That's just plain wrong." he added. Neumann is adamant that the facility could be built here. "These products can be made in Canada, using Canadian workers and fairly-traded, market-priced steel, without jeopardizing the project's viability."

Sadly, Fluor's brilliant idea to use much cheaper Chinese labour is turning out to be less than a raging success. Fluor invested vast sums in the Zhuhai fabrication yard, but now stands to lose much of it, according to an early-morning conference call with investors on September 24, 2019. During the call, Fluor's recently-appointed Chief Financial Officer Michael Steuert warned about the yard's problems: "A significant portion of the $355 million [US] investment in the fabrication yard is at risk due to lower than expected performance." Oops.

Fluor's investors might also be wondering whether LNG is such a brilliant idea after all, since the same day Fluor told them about the fabrication yard mess, the company slashed its dividend by 50 percent. When the New York Stock Exchange opened soon after the announcement, Fluor's stock price fell 11 percent.

Washington Governor Inslee formerly supported the Tacoma LNG project, but, as noted above, he's now dead opposed to it. Why did he change his mind? In fact, it was that much-maligned factor: evidence. "[T]he urgency of climate change and the environmental impacts of natural gas make clear the state's efforts and future investments in energy infrastructure should focus on clean, renewable sources rather than fossil fuels," Inslee said in a May 8, 2019 statement. "I am no longer convinced that locking in [this] multi-decadal infrastructure [project is] sufficient to accomplishing what's necessary."

See Mr Premier? A leader can change his mind when there is good reason. You can do it too.

Russ Francis recently adopted a five-year-old Alaskan Malamute, his fourth successive one from the SPCA. Like his predecessors, the new adoptee eats really weird stuff: Chopped-up dead animals.

Demand answers about the drugs you're prescribed

ALAN CASSELS

What's happening in the world of antipsychotics might keep you awake at night.

Why does it seem like everyone has an antipsychotic story they want to tell me?

For Victoria resident Roedy Green, his troubles hit a peak when he found he couldn't haul himself out of a bathtub. He felt things had already begun going seriously sideways after a series of falls, then the 71-year-old computer programmer found that he was constantly sleeping—sometimes for up to 20 hours a day—which made Roedy feel like he was losing his grip on life. In addition to starting to feel demented, the final straw was the loss of muscle strength while trying to exit the bathtub. He and his housemate Geneva Hagen began to search for answers.

This Victoria pair discovered that in addition to many other pills he was taking to manage his HIV, diabetes and bipolar disorder, Roedy was being prescribed an antipsychotic—supposedly to help him sleep. Ironically, insomnia was one problem that he had never had, and what he needed was to stay more alert.

The drug quetiapine (also sold under the brand name Seroquel) is widely used to promote sleep, though that is not an approved use. It is formally approved by Health Canada to treat major depressive disorder, schizophrenia, and episodes of mania associated with bipolar disorder, but is often used in low doses for insomnia.

When the doctor asked, "So how are you doing on the Seroquel?" Roedy and Geneva were shocked. They hadn't realized that a previous visit had resulted in a prescription for this antipsychotic. Apparently doctors at the geriatric clinic had misunderstood his complaint.

"With Seroquel he was just a zombie," Geneva told me. "He was sleeping 18-20 hours a day. He couldn't get anything done. It was like having a potted plant."

THE INDISCRIMINATE USE OF ANTIPSYCHOTICS is likely one of the biggest pharmaceutical scandals of our time, centred around one of the most expensive and inappropriately used drug classes in modern society.

The problems of antipsychotics being used to treat sleep problems have been on the radar of the medical establishment for many years. Even though antipsychotics like quetiapine are not approved to treat insomnia, they are often prescribed for that purpose.

Some have blamed the growing use of antipsychotics on the recognition that other pills used for sleeping and anxiety—the benzodiazepines—are addictive and, over time, ineffective, but that is only part of the explanation.

What often comes up is the issue of "management" in long-term care. People with dementia can often become agitated and aggressive, and therefore antipsychotics seem helpful, especially in dealing with someone who can be physically abusive to staff or other residents. In low doses, antipsychotics can be very sedating. Plus they come with a whole host of adverse effects, including a kind of unpleasant agitated restlessness called akathisia, and tardive dyskinesia, quirky movements and tremors that can be mistaken for Parkinson's disease.

The weight gain and diabetes associated with antipsychotics are also legendary. A Victoria psychiatrist once told me the story of prescribing an antipsychotic to a new patient. By his next visit a month later, the psychiatrist couldn't recognize the patient, due to the ballooning weight he'd gained.

SINCE 2003, THERE HAVE BEEN MANY REGULATORY ACTIONS against quetiapine and other "atypical" antipsychotics, which include drugs like olanzapine and risperidone, both in Canada and the US. Warnings from the FDA and Health Canada have included increased risk of diabetes symptoms, of death in elderly people with dementia, increased blood pressure in children and adolescents, arrhythmia (heartbeat rhythm abnormalities), sleep apnea (which can cause breaks in breathing or very shallow breathing during sleep), excessive sleepiness, low blood pressure upon sitting up or standing (postural hypotension), and problems with balance, effects that increase the risk of falls. In 2010, Quetiapine's manufacturer agreed to pay a US $520 million fine over allegations of promoting off-label (unapproved) uses, such as for anger management, dementia and insomnia.

A report commissioned by the BC Ministry of Health in 2011 said that 50.3 percent of all residential care patients in BC "were prescribed an antipsychotic between April 2010 to June 2011." Since then, this problem has been the subject of numerous reports and guidelines trying to tackle the issue, with limited success.

In 2015, the BC Seniors Advocate Isobel Mackenzie identified the continued overuse of antipsychotics and antidepressants in residential care as worrisome, noting that while only four percent of BC seniors in long-term care have a diagnosed psychiatric disorder, 34 percent of them were prescribed antipsychotics.

According to the Alzheimer's Society of Canada, about one-third of Canadian residents in long-term care are prescribed antipsychotic medications, despite the fact that professional geriatric societies have long warned against the use of these drugs in the elderly, especially those with dementia.

THE PRESCRIBING OF ANTIPSYCHOTICS is not only controversial but expensive. BC Pharmacare lists quetiapine as the tenth most expensive drug on the Pharmacare formulary, paying over $16 million in 2017/2018 for the drug.

Three of the top 20 drugs in BC Pharmacare's list of most costly drugs are antipsychotics.

Nationally, antipsychotics prescribed for non-seniors were the third highest public drug expenditure of all drug classes (fifth highest for seniors). In Canada this drug class consumes about $600 million in annual public expenditure.

Last year Mackenzie slammed the Province again for making very little headway in reducing the use of antipsychotic medications in BC's seniors. While numbers have decreased slightly in recent years, compared to other provinces, she complained that BC had made little headway in 2018. In that year, a quarter of BC seniors living in long-term care were still getting an antipsychotic medication without a supporting diagnosis, which is to say, they may be getting them for off-label uses.

Physicians know that the elderly need much more delicate prescribing, partly because as we age, our bodies change, and the ability to metabolize

IN 2018, a quarter of BC seniors living in long-term care were still getting an antipsychotic medication without a supporting diagnosis.

drugs is also reduced. Kidney function often diminishes with age, and without appropriately clearing drugs from your body, drugs can build up in your system, causing other problems.

Geneva told me that on the antipsychotic, Roedy became so impaired and disoriented that "we were both worried about dementia."

"What made you think that the problem might be due to the drug?" I asked.

Geneva said there were two things: A friend had warned her several months earlier that many local patients are being prescribed Seroquel for sleep, and had advised her to avoid it. When she heard Roedy's psychiatrist mention Seroquel, she remembered this warning and realized that something was amiss. "The bubble-pack had listed only the generic name quetiapine, but not its purpose," she said.

Questioning that drug and immediately withdrawing it, they both believe, had Roedy back to normal within a few days. His scores on cognitive function tests improved dramatically.

"I'm not very social," says Geneva, "yet since this happened I have had three other people tell me they are regularly using Seroquel for sleep." She adds that none of those people seem very functional.

The stories of patients prescribed drugs, often without awareness of their purpose, are endless, and the concept of "informed consent" seems to not apply. Many of us are too shy to question the safety and appropriateness of what is being prescribed, not wanting to be a prickly patient in a world where primary care doctors are a scarce commodity. As well, many busy physicians may not know, nor have the time to lay out the possible complications of an antipsychotic prescription. But often they'll respond if asked.

The inappropriate use of drugs such as quetiapine could be costing society immensely—not just in cost for the drugs themselves, but also in the rate of falls, broken bones, head injuries, drug-induced diabetes, motor vehicle accidents, and commitments to long-term care facilities.

The wrong prescription drugs can be as dangerous as street drugs. But it doesn't have to be that way. Roedy Green, who was losing his ability to function, was halted in his spiralling downhill by questioning the drugs he was being prescribed. Asking questions and questioning answers can often help change the course of one's treatment.

The medical world is slowly starting to wake up to the dire harms related to antipsychotics, and turning to safer, more effective ways to help people sleep. Doctors know that managing insomnia needs to focus on education and encouraging good sleep hygiene. The other issue too is that maybe our obsession with getting eight hours of uninterrupted sleep every night is downright harmful.

Drugs, if needed, should only be used for the shortest possible time in exceptional cases. Now it's important for patients to insist on this. This is true for antipsychotics, and almost every other drug you may be offered.

Alan Cassels is a drug policy researcher and works at UBC.

A magnet for trouble

ROSS CROCKFORD

The Johnson Street Bridge undergoes one safety review after another.

The Johnson Street Bridge is an attractive structure, especially at night. Resembling a giant bird's skull awash in blue light, it's easily the most distinctive landmark on the harbour.

Lately, however, the bridge has been drawing the wrong kind of attention. At 11:40 pm on Saturday, October 19, a man fell over a railing near the southwest corner of the bridge and hit the shore, ending up in hospital with serious injuries. "Incidents like this serve as a good opportunity to remind people to be safe, be aware and take caution while crossing [the] bridge," VicPD constable Matt Rutherford later told *Victoria News*—as if walking on the bridge requires greater caution than crossing, say, a Downtown street.

The new bridge, dressed to kill

This was just the latest odd episode at the bridge, usually involving a man emboldened by drink. (VicPD said alcohol was "a factor" in the Oct 19 fall.) One Saturday last December, an inebriated man climbed a railing, fell into the water and drowned. And famously, on a Friday afternoon last July, a drunk guy ambled past a closed gate on the multiuse path, and ended up hanging 20 metres in the air from a railing as the bridge lifted for a passing ship.

After each of these incidents, the City of Victoria announced that it would conduct a formal safety review of the bridge's equipment and operating procedures. Then, six months later, another mishap.

The previous bridge also saw accidents: in 2013, a 31-year-old guy died after falling from the overhead girders of the old bridge, where he'd been drinking with friends, and in 2006 a ferry skipper rescued an 11-year-old boy who'd been playing on the old bridge and fell into the harbour. But judging by the news archives, such incidents are occurring with greater frequency now.

For sure, this is partly an unfortunate side effect of the increasing numbers of bars, condos and pedestrians in the area, which the new bridge has encouraged. With even more condos coming, though, that raises an increasingly urgent question for the City: can the bridge ever be made completely safe?

JUST THREE DAYS BEFORE THE BRIDGE WAS INAUGURATED on March 31, 2018, the engineering firm WSP issued a safety audit of the structure, which *Focus* recently obtained. WSP identified several problems, including gaps in railings, an "increased collision risk" where the multiuse path enters Harbour Road, potential tripping hazards and deck slipperiness, the risk of debris sliding off the decks "into areas where the public will be permitted to stand," and the fact that the bridge operator has to continually monitor a network of CCTV cameras to see all parts of the structure—increasing the operator's workload during a lift, and "the potential for error in the complex steps associated with the process."

In an annotated version of the report, Taaj Daliran, the City's manager of civic services, identified steps taken by bridge contractor PCL and the City to fix these issues. They closed gaps in the railings, installed warning signs and larger CCTV monitors, and initiated a "comprehensive training program" for the operators. (Improving the Harbour Road connection is a future project.) But WSP also identified a more general worry: the risk of "aberrant behaviours" by pedestrians, especially around the lift span and the observation deck between the bridge's open-wheeled mechanism.

"[S]tanding in close proximity to a large moving object in the form of a moving portion of a large part of the structure within which observers will be standing, does present real concerns from a risk standpoint," warned WSP—which was bizarre, considering that the publicly accessible, open-wheel concept was *designed* by WSP and MMM Group, which WSP acquired in 2015. "Deliberately allowing the public to expose itself to such a risk situation may not be appropriate from a general public safety policy or engineering standpoint, particularly when public behavioural aspects of that risk environment will be uncontrollable."

The City partly dealt with this by installing a steel gate in front of the observation deck—immediately after a skateboarder was photographed riding the curved concrete edge of the north wall of the bridge's bascule pier in September of 2018. The gate is open only when the bridge operator is present, usually from 8 am to 4 pm. But is it wise to let the public near the machinery at all? "It has been part of the design to allow [the] public to be close and watch the bridge lift," the City's Daliran wrote, in response to WSP's warning.

Fraser Work, the City's director of engineering, agrees that odd behaviour has been an issue at the bridge. Even before the guy rode the

Entry to the observation deck is usually blocked 4pm to 8am

A REPORT WARNED that allowing the public near the moving bridge presented "real concerns from a risk standpoint."

lift span in July, Work told me, "a lot" of cyclists and pedestrians were rushing past closed traffic gates, because they were too impatient to wait the seven minutes it takes to clear the bridge, raise it for a passing ship, lower it and reopen it. "We even had instances where people were stopped and taking selfies, and the bridge operator had to wait, which is very dangerous as a vessel approaches," Work said. Consequently, the City installed additional CCTV cameras, improved the lights and signage, and is considering fortifying the gate on the bridge's multiuse path.

"The systems are designed to code," Work said. "These railings and these systems are designed that someone shouldn't accidentally find themselves in harm's way. But they're not going to prevent someone who wants to find themselves in harm's way from having accidents."

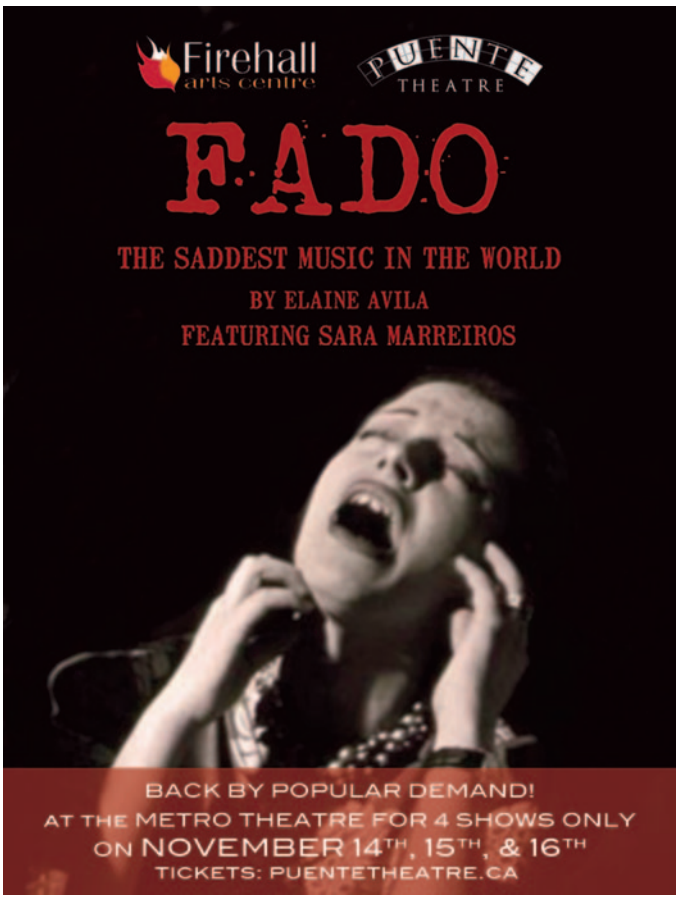
Work emphasized that the City takes safety seriously. But there are limits to what it can do. "We ask ourselves, 'What would a prudent bridge owner do?' Would we add more infrastructure at potentially very significant costs to reduce the risk of any accident happening in the future, or is it adequate right now? So there's an active dialogue about this stuff. We've had these incidents, we take them seriously, we look at them individually based on CCTV footage that we can review and statements by witnesses, and we look at them holistically over time, so we want to make sure we're taking all necessary action."

The bridge was also in the news this summer for its mechanical problems. On June 27, the City cancelled all lifts to investigate worries with the hydraulic system; marine traffic backed up in the harbour, and the City could only conduct two slow, scheduled lifts per day for two weeks afterward. As *Focus* revealed in September, the housings and O-ring seals of the system's filters were breaking down, filling the hydraulic oil with particles that could permanently damage the motors. That concern hasn't been resolved. Work says they're still running the hydraulics at reduced pressure, so the bridge is at "about 50 percent" speed, adding two minutes to the seven-minute lift/wait/lower cycle. PCL is testing new filters, and may have to reconfigure the hydraulics. The repairs should be covered by the bridge's warranty, which expires on April 1.

Then there's the ongoing lawsuits by PCL and WSP against the City, for unpaid work and losses the companies say they suffered due to design changes and delays during the bridge's construction. In June, PCL served the City with its notice of claim, keeping its lawsuit alive. PCL's lawyer filed a document in court advising that settlement discussions with the City were "expected to conclude, one way or the other, by July 31," but that date's come and gone. As City spokesman Bill Eisenhauer told me, "The litigation is still in abeyance as the parties explore the possibility of a consensual solution."

The wheels of justice grind slowly, like the bridge mechanism. Don't get too close.

Ross Crockford wishes everyone a safe and merry Christmas.



Deborah Tilby, a painter's painter

KATE CINO

The artist's finely-tuned palette and skillful brushwork capture the mood of a place.

"Red Roof Reflected" 21 x 25 inches, oil on panel

Artist Deborah Tilby is an oil painter of international stature, represented by galleries in England, Victoria and Salt Spring Island. A senior signature member of the Federation of Canadian Artists and signature member of the Oil Painters of America, her CV overflows with awards and competition prizes, and her artwork has been extolled in several international art publications.

Even so, Tilby finds each new painting a challenge. "At one point, I can expect my feelings of exhilaration to evaporate," she says, "as I realize I've lost the plot and it's not working out." Then the challenge begins to put the painting back on track.

Sometimes she thinks painting should get easier with experience. But she also realizes it's the striving to get better that keeps things interesting. Tilby is interested in anything related to the pursuit of exceptional paintings. She used watercolours for many years and now happily paints with oils. With oil paint, she can mix up all the colours she requires for one painting on her palette board. And at the end of the day, they are still workable. She can scrape off and remix with oils, combining soft, subtle tones as she works. "Blending colours as I paint gives me more flexibility," she says.

We see Tilby's painterly skills in "Red Roof Reflected," a rural scene featuring High Oaks Farm in Saanich. This historic acreage is a busy working farm. Tilby makes the white barn with red roof a focal point, showing the open barn door, farm equipment, outbuildings and fenced paddocks. But these are mere suggestions, not clearly articulated, as the paint is applied with a minimum of expert strokes. It's these deft touches with a brush that bring the painting alive. The watery field in front of the barn holds the mirror image of the red roof and white barn. Washes of blue-gray sky are reflected in the flooded foreground,

Deborah Tilby

blending into the wavering red roof. The reflections show the soft green of the fields, and the black squares of barn doors and windows. Light from the clouded sky gleams on the surface showing a mix of blue/grays, pale greens and purple mulberry. The softly-toned water contrasts with the greenish gold on the sunlit fields and barnyard.

"My palette is limited," says the artist: "I use the three primary colours (red, yellow and blue) to make all my neutral gray tones. I also use earth colours like ochre and sienna." A tone or value is the amount of light and dark in a colour (or hue). Tilby's carefully modulated tones gives a harmonious coherence to each painting.

Her success comes from years of teaching, practice and self-directed study. Tilby began to paint at age 17, after a few water-colour tips from her father. One year later, she had her first solo show in her hometown of Edmonton. Tilby later spent 14 years in England, returning to Victoria in 1992. In 2011, the artist did a three-month painting trip through Ireland, Yorkshire, Norfolk and Sussex. She was creatively inspired by the textures and ambience of the ancient buildings and walkways.

"Now I am learning to love the sea," she says. Visitors to the Peninsula Gallery in Sidney can view "Portrait of a Wave," in which Tilby captures the energetic movement of crashing surf in a blue-green ocean. "Clouds over the Sea," (see cover) also at the Peninsula Gallery, shows a familiar scene along Dallas Road. The low horizon line is topped by a moody,

From the AGGV Collection: York Wilson, Aurora, acrylic, gift of Lela Wilson, 1997.070.014.

Left top: "Morning On The Lane" 20 x 40 inches, oil on panel
Bottom: "Out For A Stroll" 10 x 12 inches, oil on panel

windblown sky. The expressive sky dominates the canvas. Storm clouds and patches of blue lift our gaze from the rocky shoreline and choppy waves. She also admits to a fondness for rowboats lying on a beach.

Tilby's enthusiasm for painting is evident in her animated explanations about process. She paints on medium-density fibreboard, gessoed and under-painted with a light sienna ground. She likes to press firmly with a palette knife, so prefers the support of fibreboard instead of canvas. Before beginning, she sketches out her composition with diluted paint, making sure shapes are balanced and the horizon line correctly placed.

Then she uses a stiff bristle brush to loosely apply sections of colour on the board. With a palette knife, she applies the paint, then tidies up with a brush. Or vice versa. Tilby uses high-quality brushes from a company called "Rosemary & Co Artists Brushes." This company sells brushes that sport the names of outstanding artists in various mediums.

Strong paintings, says Tilby, are readable from three distances. From across the room we view graphic design. When standing in front, content emerges, and with closer inspection, the artist's signature mark-making appears.

Tilby often paints *plein air* with a group of colleagues. Most times someone will look up from their work and announce: "We are so fortunate!" *Plein air* sketches record the atmosphere and details of the time and place. But Tilby's paintings are completed in the studio. "Both places and practices inform the other," she says.

In the private lessons she offers to artists, her favourite student is an absolute beginner. "It brings me joy to watch them discover how paint mixes and colour works," she says. One *plein air* colleague, who is also a student, is David Good, a retired professor from the University of Victoria. He admires Tilby's flexibility in the field, her ability to handle all kinds of weather and difficult terrain. "Deborah is a fantastic painter," says Good, "who encourages students to experiment and find their own voice." She gives candid critiques and understands the struggles that are part of painting, he adds.

Praise for Deborah Tilby also comes from one her colleagues, Catherine Moffat. A well-respected still-life painter, represented by The Avenue Gallery and Peninsula Gallery, Moffat first met Tilby in 1992. The mutually supportive artists are friends who trade paintings. "Deborah is a self-taught painter," says Moffat, "with a fine sense of design and sensitivity to value contrasts." She appreciates Tilby's knowledge of colour theory, and how she uses complementary colours to build light and shadow. Tilby works easily with challenging colours like green and red. Moffat describes Tilby as a "painter's painter," meaning other artists can appreciate her finely-tuned palette and skillful brushwork.

But you don't need to be a painter to admire Tilby's special talents. Just drop by the Peninsula Gallery on Beacon Avenue in Sidney by the Sea.

For more artworks by Deborah Tilby, see www.pengal.com or www.deborahtilby.com.

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

nancyruhlart.com

"Grimmer Valley Barn, Pender Island" 16 x 20 inches, acrylic

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"REUNION" CAROL GOLD, 11.5 X 18.5 X 6 INCHES, BRONZE

Throughout November & December

CAROL GOLD

Peninsula Gallery

Carol Gold's work has been widely exhibited in the US and Canada, receiving numerous awards and public art commissions. She creates her sculptures first in wax and then casts into bronze. Says the artist, "With these figures, I strive to convey a mood as well as to create a sense of motion in space. Through the years my sculpture has moved in the direction of increasing simplicity and growing integration of organic and geometric forms." 100-2506 Beacon Ave, Sidney, 250-655-1282, www.pengal.com.

"PASSION RED" JOSÉE LORD, 24 X 24 INCHES, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

November 2-14

PAINTINGS FROM LA BELLE PROVINCE GROUP EXHIBITION

West End Gallery

Gallery artists create a show based on the endless inspiration provided by colour, light, and landscape. Whether Quebec or France, that allusive *je ne sais quoi* is magically captured on canvas by such talented painters as Alain Bédard,Claudette Castonguay, Ariane Dubois, Jean-Gabriel Lambert, Raynald Leclerc, Annabelle Marquis, Guy Roy, and Robert Savignac. West End is pleased to welcome Quebec-based artist Josée Lord, whose still lifes are marked by a distinct style with opaque reds and blues shaping the perspective. 1203 Broad St, 250-388-0009, www.westendgalleryltd.com.

"ERRINGTON BC, LOOKING EAST TO THE MAINLAND" TAKAO TANABE, 34 X 55 INCHES, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 1982

December 7–23

DECK THE WALLS X

Madrona Gallery

Madrona celebrates the holidays with its 10th annual Deck the Walls group exhibition, highlighting select works by gallery artists. This show includes new paintings by Clayton Anderson, Nicholas Bott, Rick Bond, Karel Doruyter, Meghan Hildebrand, Claude Langevin, Halin de Repentigny, Sean Yelland and others, alongside Important Inuit and historic Canadian works by Members of the Group of Seven, E. J. Hughes, Ted Harrison, Gordon Smith, Takao Tanabe. Opening reception Sat, Dec 7, 1-4pm. 606 View St, 250-380-4660, www.madronagallery.com.

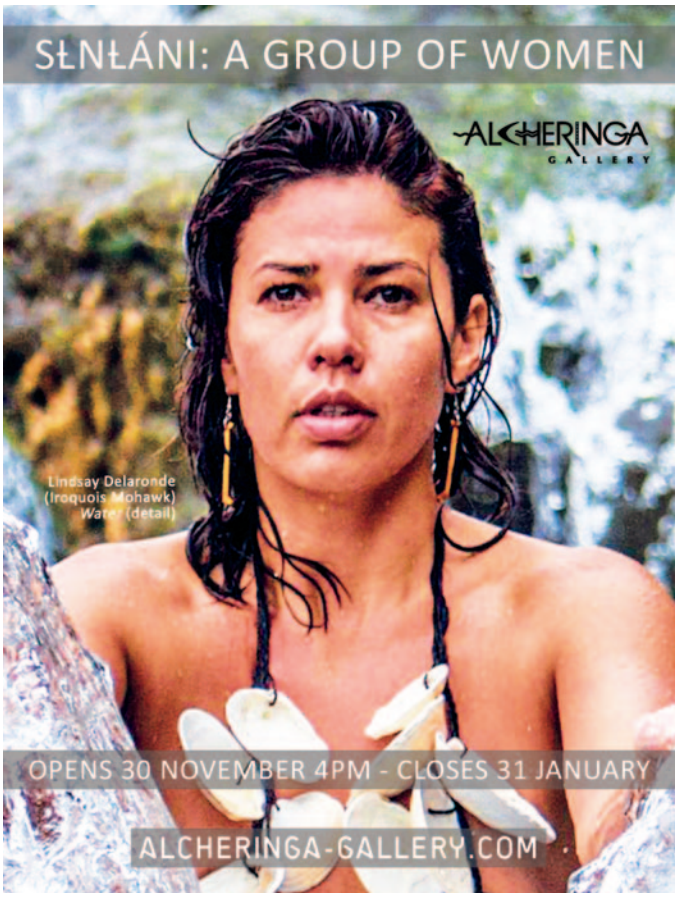
"CHEMAINUS WATER SYSTEM COFFEE TABLE" BY HECTOR URIOSTEGUI AND KAYDEN DORMA

November 16–February 29, 2020.

ONETREE 2019

Robert Bateman Foundation Gallery

This biennial event by the Bateman Foundation and Live Edge Design celebrates the life and legacy of a single tree—this year, a 200-year-old Bigleaf maple from the Chemainus Valley. More than 70 artists will take part in the biggest exhibition to date, creating original works—from furniture to musical instruments, wooden creatures to performance-based art and poetry—with a unifying theme of honouring the tree's remarkable heritage. Visit www.theonetreeproject.ca to find out more about the project. 470 Belleville St, 250-940-3630, www.batemancentre.org.



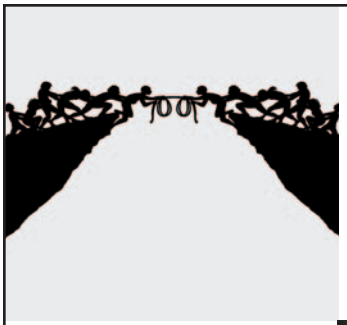
THE AVENUE GALLERY

Gorgeous Creek 40 x 60 inches acrylic on canvas

Bi Yuan Cheng – Ethereal Visions
November 14 – 24

Artist's Reception: Saturday, November 16, 1-3pm

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



Nov 1-9
Annual Members' Show
"Bridges"
Opening reception:
Friday Nov 1, 7-9pm

Nov 15- Dec 1
Joanne Hewko
"Water Under the Bridge"
Opening reception:
Friday Nov 15, 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

"A QUEST FOR FLOWERS" JOANNE GAUTHIER, 40 X 40 INCHES, OIL ON CANVAS

November 30–December 24

ADORN WITH ART GROUP EXHIBITION

West End Gallery

This exhibition showcases colour, techniques and inspiration to celebrate the season. Landscapes, still lifes, abstracts, impressionistic, urban and figurative styles are all represented from such painters as: Aleksandra, Steven Armstrong, Alain Bédard, Vé Boisvert, Naomi Cairns, Claudette Castonguay, Rod Charlesworth, Ken Faulks, Joanne Gauthier, Greta Guzek, Dana Irving, Patricia Johnston, Paul Jorgensen, Annabelle Marquis, Elka Nowicka, Glenn Payan, Guy Roy, Sabina, Jeannette Sirois and Peter Shostak—plus glassworks and ceramics. 1203 Broad St, 250-388-0009, www.westendgalleryltd.com.

The Last Picture Show • Bert Vandergugten

Bert Vandergugten

Chinatown might still seem a little rough around the edges to some, but back in the '80s, it was a lot rougher. Montreal-based artist Nicholas Vandergugten was born into that scene; he and his brother spent their early childhood folded into what he remembers as a world of "crazy characters"—a "man's world. Luis [Merino] and Darcy [Gould] and Harry [Shafer], all these big male personalities vying for their place; it's problematic. I felt there was a lot of competition as well as love and admiration, a lot of big egos mixed with sensitivity."

Nicholas' father, Bert Vandergugten, settled there with his wife in the late '70s, and produced a prolific body of work—yet had a complicated relationship with the exhibition and sale of it. "The Last Picture Show," an October event in Chinatown showcasing a half-century of prolific output, was Bert's idea, and he had every intention of being there—in body, not just spirit—"but he wasn't able to make it," Nicholas explains. Surrounded by his father's impressionistic landscapes, figure and still life paintings, and sculptures, he tells me, "It was very important for him to be here, to be present and to say goodbye…but [his death from cancer] didn't end up being that smooth."

Bert "didn't want a celebration of life, or funeral," Nicholas insists. Yet as I sit with him and talk about his father, many friends and associates come up the rickety wooden stairs to do the same. Memories and anecdotes are swirling around us, and Chinatown's old guard are recounting their '80s exploits. When Nicholas entered grade school, the family decided to move to Thetis Lake, where the boys could more safely explore. Bert made his living as a welder and fabricator, not as an artist. (He made the red iron gate in Fan Tan Alley.)

"Being an artist was more of an ideology than simply a profession. [Bert] wouldn't like the term 'profession' as an artist…showing or not showing didn't affect whether he made work, but he still needed validation," Nicholas says.

There's a sizeable volume of work still available for sale, with all proceeds going to the Victoria Youth Clinic art program. Nicholas can be reached via email at nicvandergugten@gmail.com and you can view Bert Vandergugten's work at www.bertvandergugten.weebly.com. "It's all a part of history," Nicholas offers as he gestures around the room. "Even if you don't know the man, he was an artist in the '80s. Chinatown is changing so rapidly. To hold on to something from that time is interesting."

—Mollie Kaye

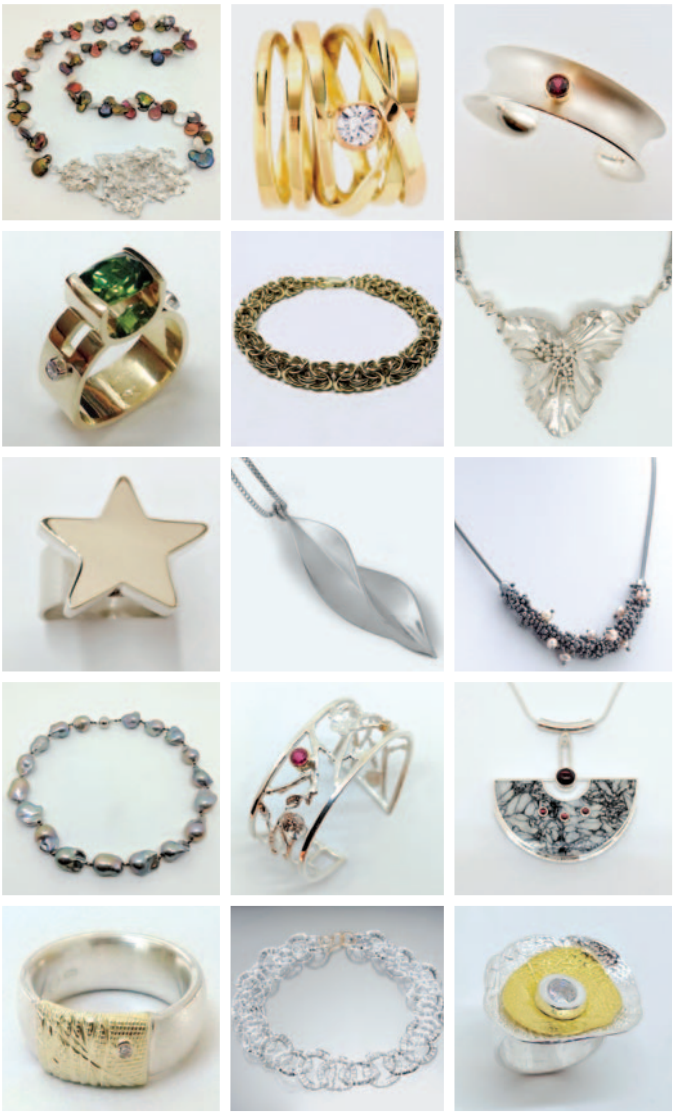
THE AVENUE GALLERY

ALL THAT GLITTERS VII
Victoria Hospice Fundraiser
Jewellery Exhibition

November 28 – December 24

Gala Evening & Oak Bay Gallery Walk

November 28, 5:30 – 7:30 pm



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

"FROLIC INLET" PHILIP MIX, 30 X 36 INCHES, OIL ON LINEN (CROPPED)

Throughout November/December

PHILIP MIX

The Avenue Gallery

Philip Mix's paintings are intenionally spare and dispassionate, a study in reduction–in economy of line, confined design, select chords of colour and minimized depth of field. Mix says, "Too many ideas…Too little time. The creative process is a lot like collecting shells on a beach before a wave whisks them away. Sometimes the tide brings a new collection of gems; sometimes the old reappear. My recent series is a wave-swept shore of ideas returned, a nostalgic postcard with a happy twist of rediscovery." 2184 Oak Bay Ave, 250-598-2184, www.theavenuegallery.com.

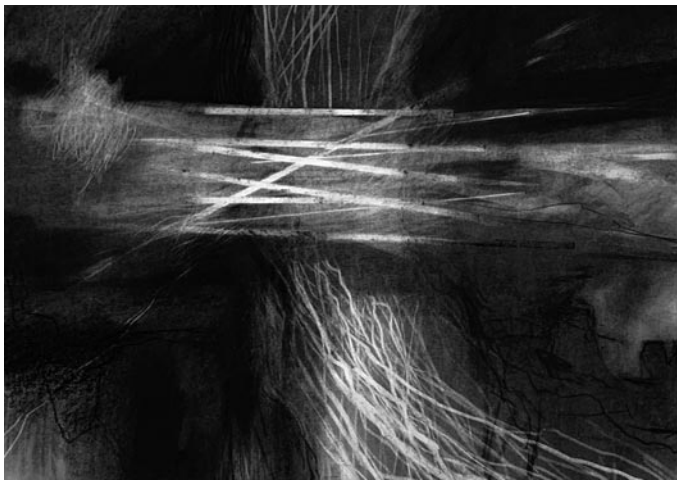
"THE ZINNIA AMONGST US" BEV ROBERTSON, 24 X 30 INCHES

November–December 31

ILLUMINATION OF LOVE: 5TH ANNUAL HOLIDAY GROUP SHOW IN SUPPORT OF BC CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

Gallery at Mattick's Farm

Participating artists include Allison Brodie, Janet Anderson, Jennifer McIntyre, Kim Hollingsworth, Irma Soltonovich, Lisa Hebden, Natasha Miller, Kylee Turunen, Rose Cowles, Vikki Fuller, Brenda Walker, Alanna Sparanese, Sandra Froher, Wendy Oppelt, Bev Robertson, Maureen Ness, Iola Scott, Everest Prokofiev, and more. Artists Meet & Greet, Nov 16, 1-4pm. 109-5325 Cordova Bay Rd, 250-658-8333, www.thegalleryatmatticksfarm.com.



"RUN THE GAMUT" JOANNE HEWKO, 22 X 30 INCHES, CHARCOAL ON PAPER

November 15–December 1

JOANNE HEWKO: WATER UNDER THE BRIDGE

Xchanges Gallery

Attracted to the bridge over the reversing falls at Tillicum Narrows, Joanne Hewko spent time making observations and collecting images. As a place for self-reflection, the bridge and the changing flow of water became metaphors for transitions in her life, shifting relationships, and the passage of time. A graduate from Vancouver Island School of Art with a degree in Interior Design, Hewko focuses on mark-making and personal expression, emphasizing mood and gesture. Reception, Fri, Nov 15, 7-9pm; Sat, Sun, 11am-4pm. 2333 Government St, 250-382-0442, www.xchangesgallery.org.

"PORTRAIT OF SHERI" GLENN HOWARTH, OIL ON CANVAS, UVIC LEGACY ART GALLERIES

Continuing to January 12, 2020

OBJECT BIOGRAPHIES: ARTISTS' LIVES THROUGH THEIR ARCHIVES

Legacy Maltwood Gallery, UVic campus

A printing block. Glaze samples. Pouches of pigments. Why are these items in UVic's archives, and what can they tell us about the lives, relationships, artworks and practices of the artists who owned them? Object Biographies is a glimpse into the lives of artists through their archives, including those of Robin Hopper, Glenn Howarth, the Limners, Katharine Maltwood, Aiyyana Maracle, Sandra Meigs, Margaret Peterson,and Vincent Rickard. The gallery is in Mearns Centre for Learning-McPherson Library. Legacy.uvic.ca, 250-721-6562.

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NICHOLAS BOTT

NOVEMBER 16 - 30, 2019

OPENING RECEPTION: NOV. 16, 1 - 4 PM

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N.J.DOTT

Body Language • November 19–December 1

David Ferguson and Miles Lowry—partners, multidisciplinary artists and founding artistic co-directors of Suddenly Dance Theatre—have for decades been leaders in Victoria's creative community when it comes to collaborative, cross-disciplinary endeavours. No wonder, then, that Suddenly Dance would have as its recurring fundraiser a gallery show where visual artists provide work for sale that riffs on the theme "Body Language."

Sculpture by Sean Shepherd

The roster of contributing artists is long and luminous, and promises a show that will offer inspiration, whatever your relationship is to dance-based arts. "It's always been a mixture… works inspired by the body or movement, largely figurative, sometimes abstract in expression," Ferguson tells me over coffee at Bean Around The World in Chinatown. All net proceeds go to support the 27-year-old company and the artists. Visual artists are donating half, with some donating their work's entire selling price to support Suddenly Dance and its wide range of productions.

Those productions include WITS in Motion, a Toolkit for Social Emotional Learning (an arts-based educational program for kids that will soon be released for free public access); "In a Nutshell," a play written by Ferguson for the Belfry Theatre; and an international exchange with Dab Dance Project from South Korea.

The art show will be up for two weeks at the recently renovated Fortune Gallery— a gem of a space in Chinatown—and will include works by Melanie Furtado, Irma Soltonovich, Sean Sheppard, Phyllis Serota, Nicole Sleeth, along with Lowry, Ferguson, and several others.

The opening on November 21 is free to the public, and will undoubtedly have some surprises in store, along with complimentary wine and a chance to mingle with Victoria's most creative citizens.

Accessibility is a theme for Suddenly Dance, and they're using technology to facilitate all aspects of interaction with and support for their organization's projects. "What's great is that we have an online box office where we sell our own tickets, and [we're selling the artworks] online as well," Ferguson explains. Donations are also welcome through the website, and monthly donors are especially appreciated, he says. "Some people will give five or 20 dollars a month all year round— it just keeps us going."

Fortune Gallery is at 537 Fisgard St. Opening reception is Thursday, November 21, 7-9pm.—Mollie Kaye

"WEST COAST TRAIL SUNSET" NICHOLAS BOTT, 60 X 48 INCHES, OIL ON CANVAS

November 16–30

NICHOLAS BOTT

Madrona Gallery

This solo exhibition will feature 20 new pieces showcasing Nicholas Bott's dramatic take on West Coast landscape. Bott studied art at UBC and holds a diploma from the Chicago School of Art. Inspired by Vincent Van Gogh and the Canadian Group of Seven, his paintings have evolved continuously into the post-impressionistic style of his current work. Bott distills landscape elements of the West Coast and Rocky Mountains into powerful aesthetic compositions to communicate a sense of the sublime. Artist reception Nov 16, 1-4 p.m, 606 View St, 250-380-4660, www.madronagallery.com.

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Hermann's marches onwards—and upstairs—on View Street

MOLLIE KAYE

The building is for sale; performers and audiences are hoping for an arts-friendly buyer.

When Hermann Nieweler died in June of 2015, his beloved jazz venue nearly perished along with him. The addresses of 751 and 753 View Street, owned and managed by Nieweler since the 1980s, had housed the iconic street-level Hermann's Jazz Club, a licensed veteran's club next door, and a succession of nightclubs upstairs. For a few years after he died, his children couldn't agree on what to do—with the two-storey building, or the businesses housed there. The jazz club had no secure future.

Then one day in July of 2018, the much-loved bar and grill—which had hosted tens of thousands of jazz performances and luminaries such as Winton Marsalis and Michael Bublé—suddenly shut down. The family didn't want to run it any more. But like the raucous Dixieland bands Nieweler loved, Hermann's wasn't about to go quietly. The loss of the unique venue was too horrifying a prospect for devoted fans, musicians, and house management, who rallied around a passionate preservation movement. Working tirelessly, these Victoria vision- and stake-holders are now navigating both the revitalization of the mission and the selloff of the building. A new owner, they say, could either explode the potential of a View Street arts hub—or pave right over Hermann Nieweler's legacy.

The non-profit Jazz on View Society—now the Arts on View Society (AOVS)—organized, fundraised, and attempted a private purchase of the building in 2017. The Nieweler family's price was $3 million back then, but though the society raised $100,000, it wasn't enough to proceed. Instead, last summer, the society struck a hard-won, five-year lease and management deal for both Hermann's Jazz Club and the neighbouring View Street Social tavern. AOVS executive director Nichola Walkden says a large portion of the funds the society raised have been used to make significant (and much appreciated) improvements to the kitchen, menu, and service. Reviving the club's original schedule of offerings, and the mentorship and performance opportunities for high school kids, constitutes a large part of booking manager Ashley Wey's passionate efforts.

The current price of the building, listed on the MLS in October of this year, is $4.5 million. Attractive to developers, Walkden says, with zoning that allows a building height in the double-digits, she and the Arts on View Society (AOVS) know their five-year lease can only protect these historic performance and community gathering spaces for so long. Walkden is fervently hoping for a new owner or developer who will share the society's vision of a View Street performance and visual arts centre, one that would serve the Downtown core in perpetuity.

Karel Roessingh on the piano at Hermann's

Wey, who grew up "rolling around on the floor" listening to bands at Hermann's during her childhood, is now a professional musician herself. She serves as a director on the AOVS board, and says nobody expects the old property on View Street to remain at a height of two stories forever. The ideal solution, both women agree, would be the erection of a brand-new, multi-use building, where every cubic metre of current performance space is rebuilt and available for use by a range of disciplines: dance, theatre, music—even visual arts.

In October, I had the opportunity to attend an event at the little-known, little-used venue now dubbed "Hermann's Upstairs," which consists of two spaces that are still under the Nieweler family's management (but could be leased to AOVS, if the society can make it work financially). Two beautifully finished rooms are each set up in cabaret style, with comfortable seating for 80 and 260, respectively. Darryl Mar, Victoria Jazz Society's artistic and executive director, often books Hermann's for its performers. He said of the recent Astrocolor event held upstairs, "We had a full house. A lot of people had never been up there before, and realized what a great music room it is. It was a wonderful evening. People were dancing, people were coming up to me—local musicians—saying, 'I never realized this venue was here. How do we get access?'" As Downtown performance spaces rapidly disappear, Mar says, the configuration of Hermann's Upstairs is especially valuable and unique, with elevated table seating around a stage and dance floor. "It's a perfect venue that doesn't take a lot of money or work to become one of the best medium-sized live music venues in Victoria," he asserts.

Wey and Walkend wish the City's zoning of these properties on View Street required developers to earmark a certain amount of square footage for arts facility rentals, providing a foundation for the kind of diverse entertainment experiences that are an essential ingredient in any thriving and vibrant downtown scene. Shortsightedness, however, is a stubborn visual impairment many politicians—and developers—share. A local industry professional tells me the guiding principles of putting up buildings in Victoria are brutally succinct: "minimize cost and risk; maximize profit." Since there are no arts-oriented zoning parameters, AOVS is "at the mercy of a developer's goodwill, and the two words 'developer' and 'goodwill' don't carry the same magnetic charge," he observes. However, if a developer

> "HERMANN WAS LIKE A GRANDPA to me, which is why I care so much about his legacy and keeping it alive."—*Ashley Wey*

can predict *more* profit and *less* cost and risk in "giving a building a 'cultural' brand, then that's another market-based reason for a possible positive outcome. If culture will sell condos," he says wryly, that's the basic logic required for "creation or retention of a cultural element." One can imagine the huge placards announcing "Downtown luxury living with music, theatre, dance and dining, right at your feet." Perhaps everybody could win, with no "goodwill" required.

But real estate development is only one point of focus for the team reviving and expanding Hermann's View Street offerings. Development of young talent has always been an integral part of the jazz club, says Wey. "It's an all-ages venue; that's what's great. Generations came through [the club's] open mic: Kelby [MacNair], I did, Nic LaRiviere, Oliver Swain, we all came through that program." What Hermann's provided, and what the pianist wants the next crop of young musicians in Victoria to access, is the opportunity "to come up [on stage] and get a chance to work with pros."

"Hermann was like a grandpa to me," Wey recalls fondly, "which is why I care so much about his legacy and keeping it alive."

Whatever eventually gets built on what was Hermann Nieweler's property, Walkden and Wey hope some portion of it will embody what the "Mayor of View Street" and patriarch of Victoria's jazz scene was all about: convening community around good times and enjoying the music he so loved; mentorship and development of new performers; and warm, welcoming gathering spaces where, Walkden says, "you can have a drink, and come as you are."

If you'd like to contribute to the Arts on View Society, see gofundme.com/Hermanns. To get a peek at Hermann's Upstairs, attend the Jazz Society's Blue Moon Marquee show on Friday, Dec 6: tickets on sale at 250-386-6121 or www.rmts.bc.ca.

Mollie Kaye is a multi-faceted mid-century enthusiast who documents her community connection project, "Turned-out Tuesdays," at theyearofdressup.com.

"Evening Beach Shore" (detail) by Kylee Turunen, 16 x 16 inches, oil on canvas

Mollie Kaye: Disappointment Guaranteed • November 19

Multi-talented Mollie Kaye, who happens to be *Focus*' arts editor, is having her solo debut as a songstress, at Hermann's in November. A former member of the Millies, a fine-tuned, taffeta-clad, *a capella* trio, which disbanded last spring, Kaye says she "wasn't sure what sort of singing project I'd do next, but I knew it would involve similar repertoire—golden era jazz standards, Broadway, '50s pop. And I've always had a flair for writing satirical lyrics to classic songs."

Kaye has a love for all things mid-century and has been spending every Tuesday for the past few months dressed head-to-toe, 1950s-style in hat-gloves-and-handbag vintage outfits. It's a way to connect to both people and to the aesthetics and vibe of that era. (See her blog at www.theyearofdressup.com.)

Mollie Kaye

Trained as a classical soprano and now coached by local jazz singer Susannah Adams, Kaye decided to do a full show of satirized jazz standards, evoking the Peggy Lee/Rosemary Clooney crooner style. "I smile and sing about topics that range from trade wars and despotic presidents to perimenopause and the indignities of online dating and job searches. The ironic juxtaposition of my character, a perfectly genteel and poised lady singer from the '50s, with modern subject matter—carefully crafted to evoke the same phonic style as the original lyrics—is going over quite well so far," says Kaye, who has workshopped a few of the tunes on Hermann's open stage.

Besides the practices and skills she developed with the Millies, Kaye will bring some of her other performance idioms into her cabaret-style show—comedy, puppetry and theatre—"it's multi-textural, as I like to say. Wait till you see my hand-held percussion instruments! If Spike Jones and Jo Stafford had a love child, I might be that person."

For her Disappointment Guaranteed performance, she's collaborating with Jeff Poynter, a multi-instrumentalist who plays in the local band West My Friend; Alex Campbell, a drummer who has played with Rosie Bitts and The Dirty Boys; and Nick Mintenko on bass, whose album *Still I Remain* has garnered critical praise.

The name of Kaye's concert is, she says, "a comment on life in general, especially seen through the lens of my 50-plus years. There's no way to live a life without disappointments, and surrendering to that truth is a big part of my evolution as a person and performer." Excited about her new adventure, Kaye says, "This project of going solo as a musical satirist is really bringing it all together for me: writing, humour, convening dialogue around relevant issues, the vintage aesthetic, mid-century music, and singing on stage."

The performance starts at 8 pm (doors at 7:30 pm). Hermann's is at 753 View St. Tickets $20 at www.hermannsjazz.com.—Leslie Campbell

"WESTERN WATCH" BI YUAN CHENG, 60 X 48 INCHES, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

November 14-24

BI YUAN CHENG: ETHEREAL VISIONS

The Avenue Gallery

Bi Yuan Cheng has practiced art from age five and was mentored by one of China's most prestigious art professors. In 1983, Bi graduated magna cum laude from ZiangXi Art University. Many of his works are on display at the University Art Museum and his sculptures stand in China's parks and facilities. In 1987, Bi's distinguished career was recognized with the title of "Chinese Art Master." Bi immigrated to BC in 1990 where he continues his masterful career in oil and acrylic painting. Artist reception Nov 16, 1-3pm. 2184 Oak Bay Ave, 250-598-2184, www.theavenuegallery.com.

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Puente Theatre 30 years on

MONICA PRENDERGAST

Theatre by, for, and about immigrants, based in Victoria and touring the world.

Puente (Spanish for "bridge") Theatre is Victoria's only theatre company with a mandate to perform plays by immigrants, with immigrants, and about the immigrant experience. The company is marking its remarkable 30 years of history in Victoria this fall. Founded by Chilean immigrant Lina de Guevara in 1989, the company began with de Guevara's search toward finding her place in the Victoria theatre community. She had moved here from Toronto with her family when her husband was hired at Camosun College in the late 1970s.

Puente Theatre's Lina de Guevara (l) and Mercedes Bátiz-Benét

De Guevara was a theatre professional in Chile who had taught and performed in both Santiago and the southern city of Valdivia. The military coup that violently overthrew the government of Salvador Allende led to her move to Canada, where she hoped to pursue her theatre career. Canadian theatre in the late 1970s and early 1980s was still a very monochromatic affair; de Guevara struggled to get cast in Victoria, beyond playing a German character in a Langham Court production of *Dracula*. So she set out to create a theatre company that would provide a space for immigrants like her to share their stories.

With the help of the Belfry Theatre's then-Artistic Director Glynis Leyshon and General Manager Mary Desprez, de Guevara succeeded in getting a grant and she co-created her first show, *I Wasn't Born Here*, with a group of Spanish-speaking women immigrants. It was very well-received and led to a series of community-based productions, led by de Guevara, on themes surrounding the immigrant experience. A number of these toured to acclaim in theatre festivals in Canada and elsewhere.

In the first decade of de Guevara's leadership, these shows tended to be larger collective creations. While very rewarding, they're also quite tiring to navigate for a director/facilitator who is working with large groups of largely non-professional performers. So, in her second decade running Puente, de Guevara moved toward co-creating a series of one-woman shows with female performers from various cultural backgrounds: Latina-Canadian, Asian-Canadian, Indo-Canadian, and Indigenous. Once again, these plays found appreciative audiences, in Victoria and beyond.

In 2011, de Guevara felt the time was right to step down from her artistic directorship, and Mercedes Bátiz-Benét was hired as her replacement.

Bátiz-Benét had emigrated to Victoria from Mexico in the late 1990s to pursue a degree in creative writing at UVic. There, she met students and faculty members in the theatre department and began to shift her interests toward performing in and writing for the stage.

I wanted to know what Bátiz-Benét had planned for the upcoming season, so we met in a Fernwood café, along with her husband and frequent collaborator Judd Palmer (also a core member of the Old Trout Puppet Theatre troupe), for what turned out to be a very engaging conversation.

I began with asking Bátiz-Benét why the next Puente show, *Fado: The Saddest Music in the World* (a remount of a 2018 hit Fringe production), has a much longer run in Vancouver than here (November 14-16). Was this a sign that the company was considering a move over the water? She assured me that after 30 years here, Puente Theatre was not losing its roots in Victoria. That said, her efforts have been focused on moving what was originally a community-based theatre to becoming a fully professional company. "This involves much greater expenses, as all artists need to be paid Equity rates." She explains, "Victoria has a shortage of performing spaces, and the ones that are available have expensive rental rates. Theatres like Inconnu and Langham Court have their own spaces, but there is a disconnect for a company like Puente that has to rely on rentals."

Also, in seeking continuing funding from the Canada Council for the Arts, the company must operate professionally. She has received project funding from the Canada Council, has also succeeded in getting continuing funding from the BC Council for the Arts, and has tripled the grant coming from the CRD Arts Commission. As Bátiz-Benét comments, "We tour our shows nationally and internationally, but we are not as visible as we would like to be in Victoria."

In dealing with this problem of not having a home to perform in, Bátiz-Benét has had to be creative. She has made use of the annual Fringe Festival to mount *Fado* in 2018 and *Lieutenant Nun* (a co-production with SNAFU Dance Theatre) in 2015. The Fringe offers artists performing spaces for free, so it is a great option for a company like Puente. A number of other Puente productions that also may have had only short runs in Victoria have proved very successful on tour. These shows include: *El Jinete: A Mariachi Opera* that won an award for Bátiz-Benét as Best Director in Toronto's Summerworks Festival; *The Umbrella*, a children's play that toured throughout Alberta and into Saskatchewan and was seen by over 15,000 young people; and another play for young audiences, *Gruff*, that toured to Saskatoon's Persephone Theatre.

Clearly the company has enjoyed some significant success under Bátiz-Benét's leadership. I ask her to tell me more about *Fado* and she replies, "The play is by Elaine Ávila, who also wrote *Lieutenant Nun*. It is a woman's story about immigration and the longing for home. This character is stuck in a boat, metaphorically, between two countries, Portugal and Canada. She and her mother go back to Portugal and, although the daughter has not understood fado music before, this inherently sad musical form helps her to find herself again." The production features local

singer Sara Marreiros playing famous fado singer Amália Rodrigues, who haunts the play as a ghost from Portugal's past.

Puente has always had a strong interest in responding to the question, "What does it mean to be an immigrant?" Bátiz-Benét's next project, a major one, draws on Mexican-Canadian artists from across Canada. The project is tentatively titled *43*, after the 43 university students who disappeared on their way to a political rally in 2014. It is believed that corrupt police officers handed the students over to a drug gang and they were all executed. Bátiz-Benét says, "As a Mexican immigrant to Canada, I have had to see my country disintegrate over time. With over 170,000 dead in the endless drug wars, I am in a privileged place here to say something for catharsis in myself and with other Mexican-Canadian artists."

The project is multidisciplinary, involving actors, dancers, musicians, choreographers and film/video artists. The ensemble worked together for two weeks earlier this year, with Bátiz-Benét as director and facilitator of this collective creation. She tells me, "We are taking a physical and visual approach to elicit feelings and emotions, so the less text we have is for the best. Our home nation is becoming a common grave." The project also involves partnering with Mexican artists, so the next phase will take place in Mexico City in May of next year, where it will premiere.

I ask Bátiz-Benét if *43* will be performed here in Victoria, and she replies, fervently, "I will always do a run here. I want to honour Lina's vision, and what she began 30 years ago." It is a proud legacy that Puente Theatre has in Victoria. I am more than happy to celebrate the company's thirtieth anniversary alongside de Guevara, Bátiz-Benét and everyone who has participated in or seen a Puente show over its long history here.

Monica celebrates Puente's history in a recently published chapter in the book *Theatre and (Im)migration* (Playwrights Canada Press), an oral history interview with Lina de Guevara that captures her contribution to immigrant theatre in Canada.

Crumble (Lay Me Down Justin Timberlake) • Nov 26-Dec 14

"The only thing Christmas-y about this play is that it takes place at Christmas time," director Don Keith tells me during our phone conversation about Theatre Inconnu's production of *Crumble (Lay Me Down Justin Timberlake)*. Playwright Sheila Callaghan uses black humour and unconventional characters to visit the topic of grief, as a mother and her pre-teen daughter cope with the first anniversary of an untimely, holiday-related death. "It's not exactly *The Nutcracker*," says Keith wryly.

Don Keith

The title of the play references the young girl's fantasies about pop star Justin Timberlake, who appears as a character. Mom's "imaginary friend" is Harrison Ford as Indiana Jones (both roles are played by actor Jon Hunwick, who also embodies the voiceless character of the girl's dead father). The two women comfort themselves with these apparitions, while fending off a "crazy cat lady" neighbour who provides comic relief and unwanted advice. "The main thing that's so intriguing," Keith offers, "is the way metaphor is used so incredibly well." Callaghan anthropomorphizes the family's apartment (played by Matthew Connelly), which talks. Says Keith, "he's the floor, he's the window, he's the ceiling, he's the wallpaper. He never speaks to anybody directly, but reacts to what's going on in this family, and reminisces about when things were better." The apartment is "crumbling right in front of us…it was always the father who looked after things…now no one is being looked after."

"The family has disintegrated," Keith says. "There's not a lot of communication…[the girl] is struggling with everything—struggling with being an 11-year-old, and the relationship with her mother, who she doesn't understand—she was devoted to her father." Still, Keith says, "The audience won't be depressed. They'll be satisfied, if not happy—and let's hope none of us have a Christmas like this."

Keith asserts that an alternative holiday theatre offering like "Crumble" is exactly what Theatre Inconnu is about. The play has been critically celebrated since its debut in 2011, and this is the first time it's been staged in Victoria. Audiences can "expect a surprise, something different. Whatever conclusion you come to, this author really understands grief and grieving, and everything's out on the table."

Crumble can be previewed on Nov 26 ($7). It runs till Dec 14; tickets $10-14. 250-590-6291 or www.ticketrocket.co. Theatre Inconnu is wheelchair accessible, at 1923 Fernwood Rd.—MK

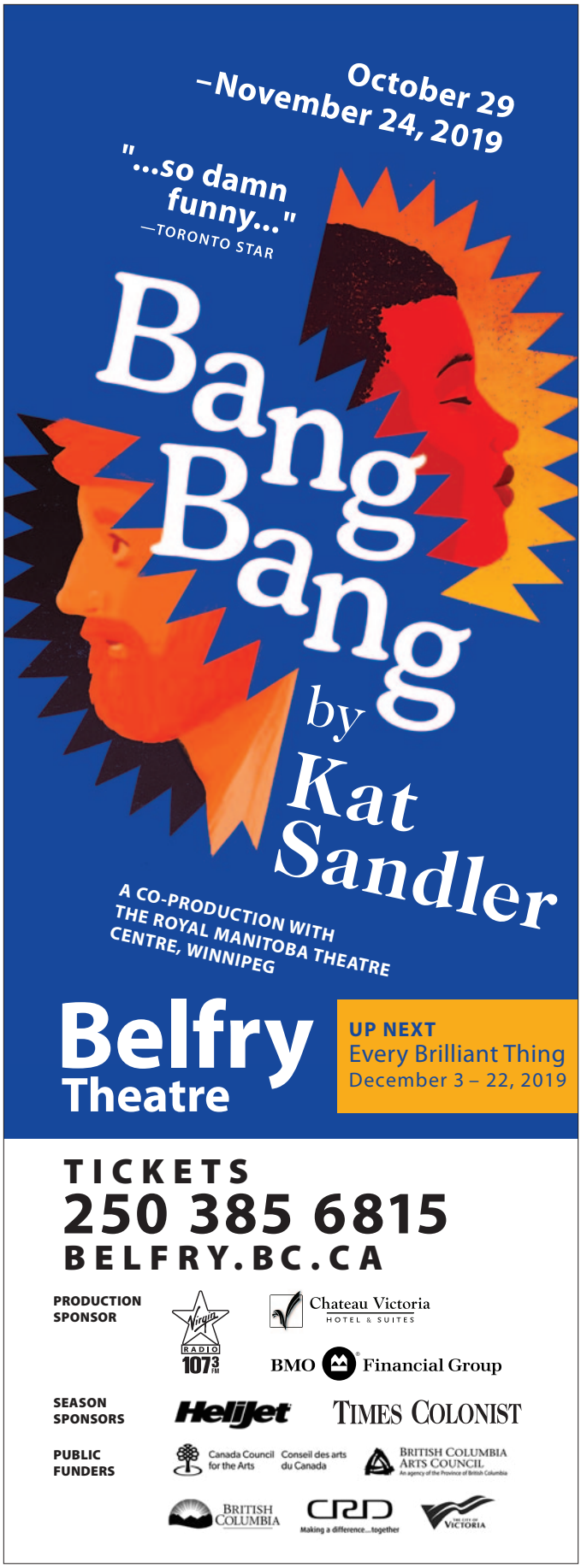
PHOTO BY PETER JENSEN, SUG-II-T LUKXS DESIGNS, VANCOUVER INDIGENOUS FASHION WEEK 2017

Continuing to December 21

URBAN REGALIA: Contemporary Fashion by Sug-ii-t Lukxs Design

Legacy Gallery Downtown

Urban Regalia is an exhibition that unfolds in two movements. Curated by Carolyn Butler Palmer (Associate Professor, UVic Art History and Visual Studies), the first movement, Contemporary Fashion by Sug-ii-t Lukxs Design, features Gitxan designer Yolonda Skelton's work, which mixes the aesthetics of Gitxan button blanket robes with a twist of Audrey Hepburn's style. The second movement opens in January 2020 and will feature the button blankets of students at Westshore Centre for Learning and Training-Colwood Campus. 630 Yates, 250-721-8298, www.legacy.uvic.ca.



Outside

GENE MILLER

Victoria society's "service engine now" light is flashing with bright urgency.

Midday on a recent Saturday, I was picking up litter in Beacon Hill Park (hypodermics capped and uncapped, sterile wipes, empty cigarette packs, fast food packaging, beverage cups, spent vodka bottles, condoms, soiled underwear, feces-covered napkins, used menstrual products, discarded diapers…the usual—our parks workers deserve a heartbreak bonus), when I was accosted by a kid, early twenties, emanating strong no-fixed-address vibes and lots of psychic static, who wanted to know where I kept my wallet.

I patted my jacket pocket: "Right next to my box-cutter." He spat at me and stumbled off.

This happened *where*? In Beacon Hill Park. In *what* city? Victoria, BC. Honestly, why travel, with such exotic, low-carbon-footprint adventures available in your own front yard?

I sense that things are getting noticeably free-form in the park, also in parts of Downtown and even throughout the city, if news reports of car, residential and business break-ins, stickups, rapes, abductions and killings project an accurate current image. Too much "outside" pushing against the only somewhat elastic limits of social order. Not tent-in-the-park outside, or crashed-under-a-tarp-on-Harris Green outside; that is, not out*doors*, but out*side*: the territory beyond social agreement, where the glue weakens, the protocols (and the values and convictions undergirding them) appear iffy, amorphous, and your radar tells you that everything bearing on rules of conduct now is improvised, exigent, based on opportunity and self-interest, not structure, principle, mutuality and grace.

Regardless of the number and visibility of people wearing uniforms, packing heat, or wielding butterfly nets, Victoria society's "service engine now" light is flashing with bright urgency. As you know, I'm not given to sweeping, apocalyptic theories of everything, so I won't flirt with the idea that all of these little skirmishes and frictions, locally and elsewhere, are dress rehearsals for, or early signs of, imminent social breakdown or catastrophe.

I read that AI and robotics are poised to steal—no, are presently stealing—millions of jobs. Locally, fewer service staff, more self-checkouts, more people sleeping in their cars; and things are just getting started here. A counter clerk recently told me that McDonald's expects to be "all voice-recognition, all robotic/no people" within a few years. Scoring a "10" on the crap-meter, only because there isn't an "11," are the preposterous assurances from the smoothocrats that, liberated by all this emergent technology, exciting new careers and vast new worlds of work and employment will open. Welcome to Liarland.

AI and robotic replacement of human work is, in our current system, an economic and evolutionary imperative that will not be denied or reasoned away. As jobless, income-less numbers swell, you may expect the incremental straining, then the complete rending, of all social safety nets and social welfare systems, as the entire clockworks of the economy goes *sproing!* and society's capacity to absorb change is critically ruptured. Anticipate a stew of social panic and chaos; angry, hungry displaced fellow-citizens bent on survival—basically, every apocalypse movie you've ever seen—and safety, public or private, a relic.

How soon? Soon. Not in some sci-fi movie neverland, but in the near-now—in line with the speed of current change. Globally, millions of info-techies being paid six-figure salaries to "liberate" us from jobs and work. That soon.

You hold the social contract, the "deal," up to the light and see that we've been careless, inattentive, distracted. We've misplaced the habits of citizenship and "public-y," that is, social mutuality, a shared ownership of place and space beyond one's home, a deep and active appreciation of shared assets.

Ironically, "we take care"—emphasis on "we"—has always been Victoria's true semeiotic message: all those beautiful public buildings, hotels, homes, gardens, clipped lawns, the gorgeous postcard vistas. Are they real at present or just glimpses of the past, memorabilia, tourist props? The suspicion hovers that while the lawns are clipped, the social infrastructure's rusting.

Into the vacuum of fading mutuality have flowed unsurprising expressions of privacy, self-protection, disengagement, delegation: signifiers of self-interest married to social passivity. Small wonder if there's a rise in the sense of public risk and diminished feelings of comfort and safety—a loss of citizenship, proprietorship—in the public realm, accompanied by an up-spiraling of the lockdown aesthetic…the full NIMBY.

But as history confirms, build a better-defended public realm and life just grows more creative (and aggressive) predators.

When I got here in 1970, there was an atmospheric message: "we're in it together." Likely, the Depression years and war years still resonated in social memory, and both of these reinforced the values and practices of common cause, mutuality and cooperation. Then came the '70s and '80s, a heady payoff for that legacy of enforced emotional repression, of holding it in. While we were busy shaking off gravity, who could be bothered to consider that the terms of community—ritual, shared values, shared history, shared want and need, reciprocity, a capacity for self-subordination—were diminishing; and that while social relations were becoming looser, more voluntary, less ritualistic and seemingly more authentic and expressive, the foundations of public-y were collapsing beneath the values and messaging, the dark magic, of our cornucopian culture. Fun! Fun! Fun! Me! Me! Me!

We're at a pregnant moment, and a city conversation must be convened to consider social infrastructure, values and intentions, and obstacles to ideal social functioning. In the absence of that conversation, life will intervene, jarringly, with some catastrophic smack, unsympathetic that such conversations are hardest to organize when they are most needed.

In my view, greater personal enlistment in public life, despite any "inconveniences," is obligatory. I don't mean that every single person in Victoria has to down cell phones and laptops, link arms and start singing "Solidarity Forever!" But consider: existing bureaucratic structures, seen to be efficiencies within the social project, are also surrogations, abstractions, emotional distancers: "Homeless? Oh, *they* look after *that*." And so on.

Community: a stirring idea invoked with great fondness, just when the signals are most faint and the reach for more understanding never more challenging. "Community" is becoming a nostalgia word, like "grandma's house."

In the setting of such thoughts, it's interesting to consider social sleepwalking: we see things deteriorating, but we abstract—essentially, disregard—what we witness, so it doesn't register as grounds for worried action. Anything to preserve our psychotic belief that good things come from the good-things fairy rather than from herculean, continuous social effort.

What's impaired is not our ability to see such declines or threats, but our distractedness and the ambiguous structure and protocols of social alarm—roughly, the difference between "Somebody should do something about that" and "Omigod, this could tear our house down!"

The smallest gestures and efforts to acknowledge and respond to today's looming threats are met with Lilliputian annoyance, exasperation, disapproval, counter-view. Victoria's Mayor Lisa Helps must sometimes wonder if she's bucking the totality of social inertia in her effort to secure the future with a bike lane network. Social justice champions Ben Isitt, Jeremy Loveday, Sarah Potts and their similarly-disposed council colleagues come in for incredible amounts of contempt and scorn for their efforts to use the tools of civic policy to modestly expand housing affordability in our pricey town.

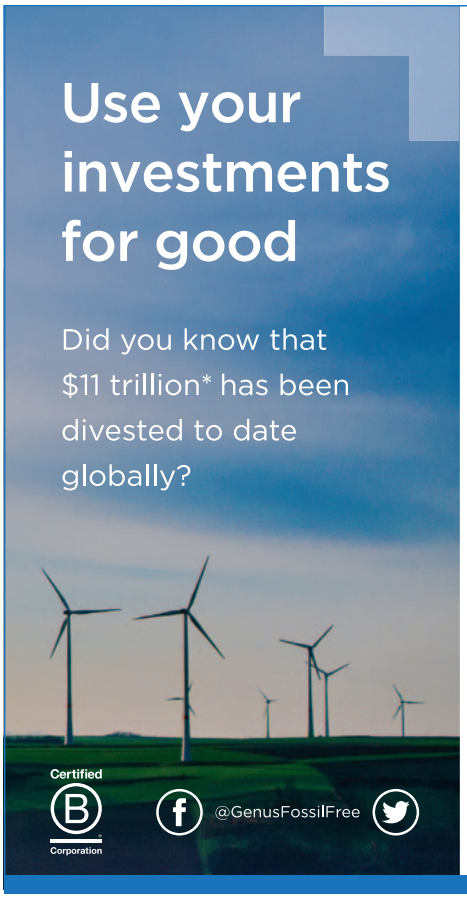
Jared Diamond in *Collapse* notes that social success requires "the courage to practice long-term thinking, and to make bold, courageous, anticipatory decisions at a time when problems have become perceptible but before they have reached crisis proportions."

Diamond effectively says in few words what I've tried to say in a thousand; but both Diamond's words and mine point toward a proposition that colleague Rob Abbott and I are elaborating in a book-length writing project, working title *Futurecide*. The idea is that catastrophe, ultimately, is ecological, nature's problem-solver. Catastrophe, collapse, breakdown are all messages from nature about limits and tolerances and, in humanity's case, a cautionary note about the value of caretaking.

Remember, in an ecology, including the social ecology of this city, nothing is parenthesized and there's no outside.

For better or worse, it's all in.

Founder of Open Space and co-founder of *Monday Magazine*, Gene Miller is currently promoting ASH, an affordable housing concept.



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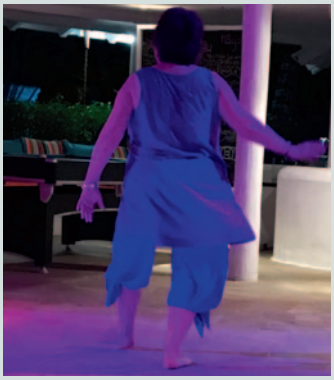

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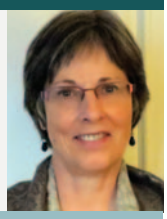

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Why are we in trouble?

MALEEA ACKER

A plea for action on this column's fourth anniversary.

The author's front yard in 2011, around the time of the first citation

Flourishing native plants, around the time of the second citation

I teach a geography course at the University of Victoria called Landscapes of the Heart. In it, I take my students out into local landscapes—Mount Tolmie, Mary Lake, Tod Inlet—with the goal of opening their eyes and hearts to this region's species and ecosystems. We paint and draw in the field. We look at how poets, visual artists, philosophers and geographers are trying to connect us to place. Students spend the fall immersed in landscape, producing some of the most thoughtful, emotionally engaged work I've had the pleasure of seeing as a teacher. The course begins with a three-hour class called "Why are we in trouble?"

This issue, I want to posit some answers to this question. I've been writing a column on volunteer stewards in the region for four years with *Focus* and I love the work. It's inspiring getting to meet so many people who are passionate about our local ecosystems and who try to improve life for the multitudes of creatures with whom we share these islands.

But this month's column turns the lens on my own experience as an environmental steward. I think one answer to why we're in trouble can be illustrated by my own history. In 2011, during the writing of *Gardens Aflame: Garry Oak Meadows of BC's South Coast*, I began nurturing a native plant garden in my 5,300-square-foot yard. It's a project that has raised no end of protest from my neighbours. I live in Saanich's Gorge-Tillicum neighbourhood, where former farmland was planted with houses in the 1930s and 1940s. The clay soil supports boulevards of blackberry. On my street, trees are sparse and gardens infrequent. People mow their dandelions.

Since I began the transformation of my sterile lawn into a wild ecosystem, I've been cited by Saanich bylaw enforcement officers twice. The first citation (for cultivation of noxious weeds) was in 2011, when I had let the grass grow long to see if camas lay buried in the lot. The fight I launched against the municipality's citation landed me on the front page of the *Times Colonist*. I won. Since then, I've cultivated a native hedgerow (of Oregon grape, Nootka rose, snowberry, red osier dogwood, salmonberry, and Pacific ninebark). I've also planted 17 native trees. After eight years of seeding and growth, the hedge is 10-12 feet tall and supports a wide variety of bird species through the year. Camas, nodding onion, vetch and fawn lily bloom in the meadow. There are Garry oaks, Douglas-fir, arbutus, several mock orange, honeysuckle and ocean spray. When a kid entered my yard on Halloween last fall, he exclaimed, "it's like walking into a forest!"

The wildness has encouraged more wildness. Last summer, I hosted a family of weasels. There are crickets (which I transplanted from Mount Tolmie), over a dozen species of songbirds, hummingbirds, lizards, raccoons, dragonflies, mason and bumble bees. A raven pair, a barred owl and a Swainson's hawk use the yard to hunt. This fall, I harvested my first edible mushrooms (*lepiota rachodes*), which shows that the yards of mulch I've brought in and the undisturbed soil are now supporting a healthy mycorrhizal layer (which supports the health of trees). All this in a desertified neighbourhood largely barren of boulevard trees or anything approaching native habitat.

In April 2018, when Saanich council struck down the Environmental Development Protection Area bylaw (EDPA), along with it went changes to whole series of bylaws; they had been rewritten to exempt naturescaping property owners like myself from being cited. When the EDPA died, these bylaw changes died too. And so, I received my second citation from Saanich last summer, when at least two complainants reported me for noxious weeds and impingement of the hedge into the sidewalk right of way. Saanich sent a regular post letter, a registered mail letter, a bylaw officer, then two environmental services officers to the house. After their visit, charges were dropped. How many native boulevard trees could Saanich have planted for the costs of chasing an imaginary foe? How many camas bulbs?

Without the EDPA and associated bylaws, there's little to stop developers and property owners from cutting trees, and little to encourage them to plant native species, other than their own stubbornness and vision. Fortunately, there is a great deal of that in the region (look to Oaklands' Tamara Batory and her plan to transform boulevards on Lang Street into pollinator corridors as a recent wonderful example), but there needs to be more.

In September, Cornell University published a seven-university study showing that since 1970, bird populations in Canada and the USA have dropped by 30 percent. Billions of birds have vanished, including over 1 billion forest birds, 700 million grassland species, and 160 million dark-eyed juncos (a favourite at my feeder). The cause? Habitat

loss. The results of the study, says its lead author, Ken Rosenberg, are "a strong signal that our human-altered landscapes are losing their ability to support birdlife," indicating a "coming collapse of the overall environment." The collapse isn't limited to birds. Similar studies have shown precipitous drops in the population of insects, amphibians, freshwater, saltwater and terrestrial megafauna.

Last year, Jan Zwicky and Robert Bringhurst—Quadra Island philosophers, poets and scholars—published *Learning to Die: Wisdom in the Age of Climate Crisis*. They mourn what they see as a fundamental change in how humans live on the Earth: a loss of "genuine connection to the natural world [that] is fundamental to human flourishing." When we try to make something into what it isn't (a lawn is a nostalgic memorial to England's sprawling estates), we disconnect from what is actually here: moss, liquorice fern, fairy cup lichen—all the species Langford is mowing down for housing tracts and cedar hedges.

The planting I've done connects me to the Earth—to the *place* I've chosen in this world, with its rocky outcrops, its plethora of food sources, its clemency and beauty. It helps others do that as well. The Native Friendship Centre's daycare leads kids past my house every morning. The teachers stop and point out the native species. They eat salmonberries in spring.

The collapse of ecosystems is being hastened by climate change, making our remaining natural areas (including those on private land) all the more valuable. The stewardship of parks in our region is laudable; we couldn't do without the tireless volunteers who keep these places beautiful. But we need every single resident in the region—whether you rent or own or live in a condo—to plant and care for native species. Take a trip around the region and count the trees that have succumbed this summer to the increasingly unstable weather that climate change is bringing. I counted over two dozen on one walk in Thetis Lake Park. As species die, the pressure mounts on those of us who are still lucky enough to harbour some form of biodiversity in our yards.

What if we looked at stewardship as a task not just for parks? What if care of our yards and boulevards were a responsibility as profoundly important as that for the Sooke Hills or Playfair Park? I hear stories from neighbours who don't water their boulevard trees because it's "not [their] responsibility." Actually, it is (both legally and philosophically). Our parks won't compensate for Garry oaks lost to viewscape improvements or meadows lost to development. Or laurel hedges (a species on the invasives list in Washington State) and English ivy, instead of salmonberry and honeysuckle. Or Kentucky blue grass instead of bunch grasses and kinnikinnick. The rich complexity of nature needs to supplant our nostalgia for tidiness and control.

Why are we in trouble? We are adhering to outdated ideas, attempting to manage, not garden, the life outside our doors. We're okay with wildness in parks, but fear its appearance in our own yards. Why does long grass look wrong to us? Why are Garry oak trees considered messy? It's time to jettison these damaging preconceptions. Time to live in place, where we are, not some tidied-up version of suburban glory. Let's bring the beauty of our parks home, so that other species can also live outside those refugia. We can't support every species in our backyards, but we can certainly help. It's not going to happen, however, if we keep mowing our dandelions, and everything else, into submission.

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 the social sciences and poetry.

Climate change is now top-of-mind

TRUDY DUIVENVOORDEN MITIC

But both the new federal government and citizens must dig deeper to face it.

The election is over, and by now the members of our 43rd parliament will have settled into their hallowed Ottawa seats. Notwithstanding the new faces and bustling rearrangement of desks in the house, our most urgent reality remains the same: we have a climate crisis on our hands. We left it idling unattended for decades, and now it's speeding full bore to the crossroads of no return.

Such a statement is no longer hyperbole. We can see for ourselves the strain on nature. We can see it in the fires, floods, storms, melting polar ice, and erratic weather systems, and in the exquisite microcosms of our own gardens and local parks. We can understand it too, the folly of filling our atmosphere to the breaking point with untold and unchecked volumes of ancient and sequestered carbon. (Generations from now, researchers will puzzle over why we let things get so out of hand. Why we didn't look up, see the potential of the sun, and then begin vigorously innovating to harvest its endless clean energy.)

But now, perhaps, things might at last start to change. This past election finally saw climate change emerge as a top-of-mind issue, despite some early foot-dragging by the big-party politicians. Throughout the country it was robustly debated by local candidates at more than 100 town halls. Locally it drew well over 20,000 people of all ages to a Downtown climate strike. Across the land it propelled a million people to the streets, all thirsting and champing for a justly tenable future.

The prospect of such a future has become somewhat brighter now, with the Liberals returning as a minority government enrobed in the mantle of newfound mindfulness for cross-party cooperation and collaboration. The prime minister and his pared-down team would do well to feel chastened by hard evidence that two-thirds of Canadians have climate change concerns that will not be placated by further distraction and detour. We've made it pretty clear that we want our leaders to quit their feeble and perfunctory pecking at the trifling edges of this all-encroaching threat. In ever-increasing numbers, we are demanding strong and overarching action on climate change, and that persistence will not fade away.

It's going to be challenging—no, daunting—for our leaders to fix this, considering the deep and bitter regional divides, and the seemingly inevitable collision course of one Canadian's livelihood with another Canadian's right to a protected local environment.

Here's what Ottawa really needs to understand: You can't appease one region by sacrificing another. You can't champion both the fossil fuel industry and serious climate action. You can't continue to pour billions of dollars into fossil fuels while claiming there's no money for renewable energy. You must start clarifying that jobs will be *changed*, as is already the case, not *lost*. You can't keep favouring the traditional economy just because your investors and supporters and lobbyists have not yet finished their business there. You can't keep standing in the way of real and required change.

As for ourselves, evidence is growing beyond anecdotal that we're ready to do some heavy lifting of our own. A recent, CBC-commissioned survey of 4,500 eligible Canadian voters revealed that almost three-quarters indicated a willingness to make "some" or "major" lifestyle changes themselves.

Those changes included buying local (75 percent), lowering the thermostat (66 percent), reducing overall consumption (55 percent), reducing driving (47 percent) and becoming vegetarian (17 percent). These combined actions alone would make a huge difference, but they are still not far-reaching enough, given how we've let this slide to the eleventh hour.

We must dig deeper, and people already have, by forgoing a car, becoming vegan, living in smaller spaces, eschewing or cutting back on air travel, and choosing to remain childless. We don't all have to make every dramatic change, but we each have to make some.

If we want to continue living in a clean, diverse and sustainable environment.

If we want this for all of the world's citizens.

The season of renewed peace, hope and goodwill is just a few weeks away. Maybe this year there'll be gifts for the Earth, which in the end are priceless gifts for all of humanity. We can do it. Just look around: We've already begun.

I hope our team in Ottawa can too.

Trudy thanks you for reading and wishes you a happy and hope-filled holiday season. May peace and wellbeing be upon your home and loved ones.

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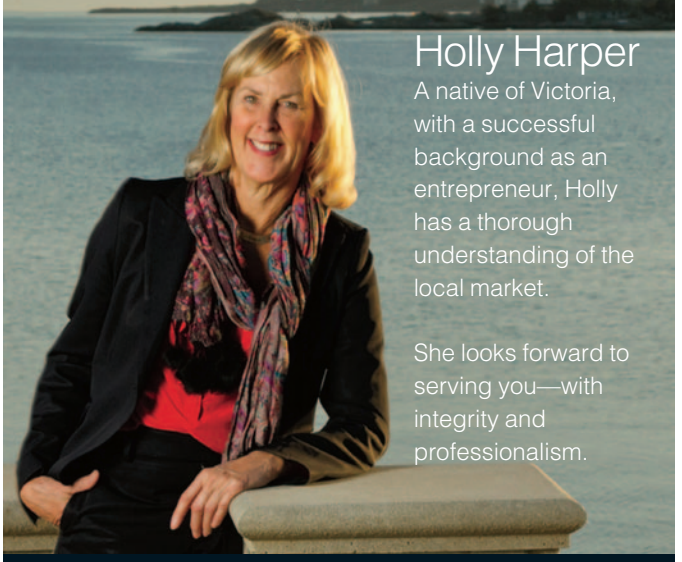

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