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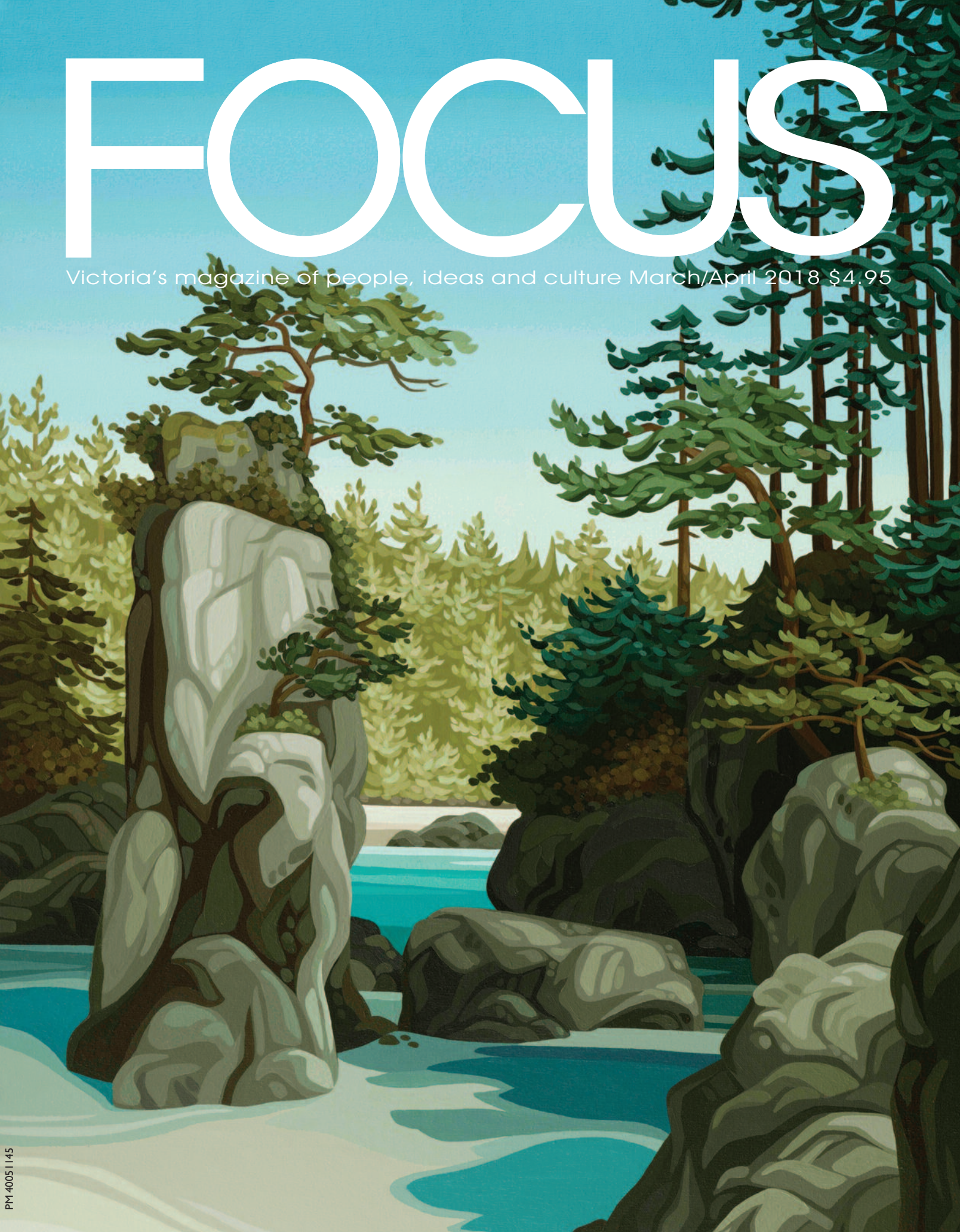

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contents

March/April 2018 VOL. 30 NO. 4

4 MATH AND ETHICS ARGUE AGAINST TRANS MOUNTAIN
If we're going to lower emissions, allowing Alberta to increase fossil-fuel-related exports will harm the rest of Canada.
Leslie Campbell

12 ONE NUCLEAR BOMB IS TOO MANY
Addressing the generational gap in understanding around nuclear disarmament.
Mary-Wynne Ashford

14 WHY ARE CITY COUNCILLORS ACCEPTING A WORLD-CLASS BODGE?
The City is refusing to provide records that would show who knew what, and when they knew it.
David Broadland

18 DEVELOPMENT BESIDE GONZALES HILL PARK RAISES ALARM
Is the CRD failing to steward its only regional park in the core of the city?
Leslie Campbell

22 "DRUG HOLIDAYS" AND DEPRESCRIBING
The growing movement to wind back excess medication.
Alan Cassels

24 DID SAANICH'S EDPA POSE A THREAT TO PROPERTY VALUES?
Was a real battle fought over an invented crisis?
Briony Penn

28 SHOULD FARMLAND BE RESERVED FOR FOOD GROWING?
Marijuana greenhouses, wineries and monster houses are eroding BC's already limited capacity to feed itself.
Judith Lavoie

30 ARE THE CITY OF VICTORIA'S MARIJUANA REGULATIONS WORKING?
And what will happen next summer when recreational cannabis becomes legal in Canada?
Pamela Roth

32 FORM AS MEANING(S)
Four First Nations curators bring new perspectives to the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria's Pacific Northwest prints collection.
Aaren Madden

48 PLAYS WITH PURPOSE AND MEANING
Zelda Dean sees theatre as a way to break down barriers.
Mollie Kaye

52 ORCHESTRATING A LIFE
Conductor Yariv Aloni lands, learns, and leads in Victoria.
Mollie Kaye

54 NOT IN OUR SPACE
Harassment, bullying and theatre culture.
Monica Prendergast

56 THE STRENGTH IN VULNERABILITY
Claire Sicherman delves into the silent stories of her family's traumatic past.
Amy Reiswig

58 AMALGACIDE
Is the call for political amalgamation of CRD municipalities, at its core, motivated by toxic social impulses?
Gene Miller

60 LOOKING AT THE TINY THINGS
Mary Haig-Brown wants us to see vital connections in the natural world.
Maleea Acker

62 WE DESERVE EVERYTHING WE'RE GOING TO GET
Site C will help power up cannabis hot houses, Bitcoin mining, and LNG!
Trudy Duivenvoorden Mitic

editor's letter	4
readers' views	6
comment	12
talk of the town	14
palette	32
arts highlights	36
culture makers	48
vibe	52
curtain call	54
coastlines	56
urbanities	58
natural city	60
finding balance	62

ON THE COVER

"San Josef Bay" by Dana Statham, 24 x 36 inches, acrylic on canvas. See story on page 45.

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Math and ethics argue against Trans Mountain

LESLIE CAMPBELL

If we're going to lower emissions, allowing Alberta to increase fossil-fuel-related exports will harm the rest of Canada.

When Prime Minister Trudeau said a year ago that the Alberta oil sands would be "phased out" over time, Albertans were furious. Wildrose Leader Brian Jean, who represents Fort McMurray, told CBC, "We certainly don't need out-of-touch, federal politicians sounding like Jane Fonda on this topic." Alberta Premier Rachel Notley was more circumspect. Still, if Albertans aren't ready to embrace the end of the oil sands *ever*, then it's not surprising some of us are fighting to keep bitumen in the ground.

With politics being what it is, we are going about that task in a roundabout way. The BC government is heading to court to get a ruling "to reinforce BC's constitutional rights to defend against the risks of a bitumen spill." In effect, this should allow BC the right to put limits on what goes into (and comes out of) pipelines that cross our province. If it's judged that we don't have that right, I am not sure what the government's next move is, but many citizens seem ready and willing to block construction if that's the only option.

Meanwhile, BC First Nations are also in court with no less than 15 challenges to Kinder Morgan's plans. They have been joined by other First Nations. "First Nations all across Canada are not going to let First Nations in BC stand alone in their fight against Kinder Morgan: now more than ever we have to stand up for the water, a livable climate, and a decent future for the next generation," said Chief Arnold Gardner of Eagle Lake First Nation in Ontario.

While the court cases play out, Trudeau and Notley continue to try to sell their scheme of building "a bridge to a cleaner economy" by expanding oil sands production and finding higher-paying overseas buyers. They argue this will be good for the rest of Canada's economy—that it is in our national interest. But their math doesn't work.

Only if we're not concerned about all the impacts of fossil-fuel emissions—sea level rise, ecosystem disruption, ocean acidification, desertification, drought, crop failures, and so on—would Trudeau and Notley's insistence on getting Alberta bitumen to foreign markets make sense. But they say they are committed to capping emissions at a level that will keep us meeting our international commitments, which are aimed at a maximum 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming—necessary to reduce the intensity of all of the above impacts.

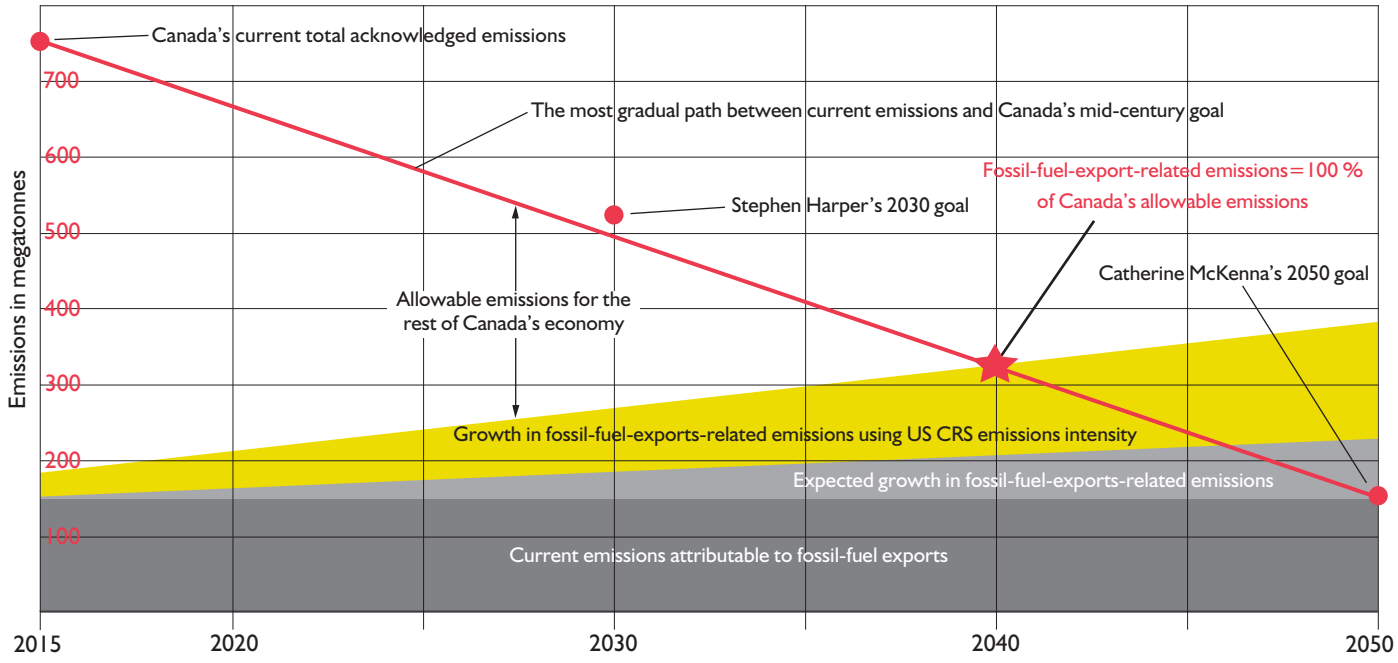
Canada has agreed to lower annual national emissions to 150 megatonnes by 2050. In 2015 we emitted 722 megatonnes of carbon, so we've a long, long way to go. Alberta has agreed to cap oil sands production—currently at 67.8 megatonnes (at least)—at 100 megatonnes annually. Just on the face of it, this is going to pose problems as the "caps" pull in opposite directions.

But it's even more problematic as some number-crunching shows. Last year in *Focus*, David Broadland showed why it is more than likely that Alberta's oil sands are already pumping out more than its annual cap of 100 megatonnes of carbon emissions. He pointed out that when applying the nonpartisan US Congressional Research Service figures for average emissions intensity—instead of less reliable Canadian figures—emissions from Alberta's oil sands (from extraction, upgrading and pipeline transportation) are already at 116 megatonnes, and not at the 67.8 megatonnes that Environment Canada has them. David tried another, more conservative analysis, and got 94 megatonnes.

Neither of these totals include "fugitive emissions"that escape from tailing ponds, oil sands mine faces, oil and gas valves, pumps and pipelines. Alberta already produces the lion's share of those in Canada at 35 megatonnes each year (Canada's total is 61 megatonnes).

CANADA'S EXPECTED FOSSIL-FUEL-EXPORTS-RELATED EMISSIONS 2015-2050

The red line shows the track Canada's emission would need to follow to meet the Trudeau government's emissions reduction target



Because Alberta and Trudeau's government only acknowledge 67.8 megatonnes, Alberta has permission to ramp up another 50 percent above current levels.

"The contradiction of facilitating oil sands growth while discouraging the use of fossil fuels with a carbon tax or fees is jarring enough," wrote David. "But the bizarre, long-term consequences for the Canadian economy of these two initiatives, if they both play out as hoped for by Trudeau and Notley, seems to have been overlooked." Alberta would have a stranglehold on allowable emissions. Bitumen production for export will come to dominate Canada's national carbon budget. Virtually all other industries will have less and less ability to emit, because the oil sands will be using up our national allowance.

As shown in the accompanying graph, by 2045—or 5 years earlier if oil sands emissions have been underestimated—fossil-fuel-export-related emissions will have eaten up Canada's entire carbon budget. This includes all of Canada's fossil-fuel exports, not just Alberta's bitumen. That leaves only 22 years to transform every household and every industry to operating totally carbon-free just so Canada can develop its low-value hydrocarbon export industry. Most of those emissions will be tied to Alberta's export of low-value bitumen.

The *National Observer's* Barry Saxifrage has arrived at similar conclusions. In a recent piece on oil sands domination of future emissions, he writes: "On the present course, almost everything else in Canada would have to shut down for the country to meet its climate change targets."

Saxifrage starts with the current acknowledged emissions claimed by Environment Canada. Still, by 2050, the oil sands will consume 78 percent of Canada's allowable emissions. More actually, because, as he reminds us, "the Paris Accord requires all nations to set increasingly ambitious targets every five years."

Instead of being part of a climate solution for Canada, he points out, "Alberta's 'hard cap' allows just one industry to consume our nation's climate goals and obligations."

Saxifrage also does some interesting number-crunching on jobs, which shows the myth-making afoot when Notley and Trudeau say we need to develop the oil sands for our economy. Estimates from Stats Canada and Petroleum Labour Market Information (PetroLMI) show the oil sands provides a paltry 2.5 percent of Canada's GDP, and only 0.5 percent of Canada's jobs.

It would be folly to think that's going to get better. Recent data from PetroLMI, Saxifrage notes, show the oil sands industry is on track to *reduce its workforce by 21 percent per barrel* between 2010 and 2021. "All sectors of the industry—in situ, mining and upgrading—are significantly reducing workers per barrel," he writes. "Demanning" or "zero manning" the oil sands is how one Cenovus Energy executive describes it to investors. Meanwhile, Suncor is replacing hundreds of its workers with driverless trucks.

The math and logic are clear, and so is our moral responsibility to future generations. Canada's per capita GHG emissions are the third highest in the world. Notley can't be allowed to increase Albertans share of allowable national emissions for the purpose of increasing fossil fuel exports. To do so would damage the economic prospects of all other Canadians and prevent us from being a good global citizen.

Leslie Campbell is *Focus*' editor. For more on the numbers, see "Alberta's Deathgrip on Canada" at www.focusonvictoria.ca, and check out Barry Saxifrage's work at www.nationalobserver.com.

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Bridge design flaw hidden for a year

David Broadland's article on the Johnson Street Bridge design flaw—and on the City's failure to openly disclose it—displays an uncanny level of diligence and public-spirited curiosity, unmatched by anyone in Victoria.

Incidentally, the City's FOI web page contains links to information on the Johnson Street Bridge site. But on January 9, shortly after publication of the *Focus* story, the links all reveal nothing but error messages. For instance, clicking on the main bridge site link yields the following: "Our site www.johnsonstreetbridge.com is temporarily unavailable due to maintenance."

Did someone at City Hall discover weakness or fatigue in the bridge *website* as well? Perhaps, as we speak, City Hall staff are furiously bolting steel plates over those website weaknesses as a temporary fix. All under cover of darkness, to be sure.

There are two flaws here: the first is in the bridge design; the second is the way the City dealt with the first. Mr Broadland raises some essential questions regarding who knew what, and when. It is simply not credible that none of the councillors were told of the problem shortly after the December 9, 2016 non-compliance report.

When they were told—likely no later than December 10, 2016—one has to wonder who advised them that the better path was to keep it undercover and hope that nobody noticed. Fortunately, Mr. Broadland did. And I bet that, upon hearing of the flaw, more than one city councillor uttered two words: the first would have been "oh," the second starts with "s."

Russ Francis

Excellent article by David Broadland on the Victoria Bridge. A wonderful piece of well-researched journalism, highlighting a major problem which will certainly promote rapid corrosion of that structure. After 40 years in the structural steel industry, I have never seen such an appalling patch—which definitely needs a thorough third-party review by an independent engineer, NOT by the engineer of record! Congratulations on a job very well done.

Martin Bache

I was very interested in David Broadland's article on the new bridge. Some time ago, an engineer who had been given a thorough tour of the existing Blue Bridge told me that it could be fixed up for about a million dollars and then be good for another 50 years. Here we are, looking at a project riddled with flaws and unnecessary expenditures.

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Why is it that as soon as people are elected to City council (or any government position) they lose all fiscal responsibility, as well as their common sense? Einstein was right when he said that human stupidity is infinite.

Terry J. Waller

Bravo on continued attention to the JSB project. Like Ross Crockford, I predicted cost overruns, and as I was enrolled—concurrent to the protest and beginning of the design phase—in the Master's Certificate in Project Management (UVic Gustavson/Schlich), I saw parallels in examples of failures in the larger world. Once the Sydney Opera House construction got to 100 percent above estimates, there was no turning back. It eventually reached over 1400 percent cost overruns.

The bridge requires movement, and was sold to the public as both a seismic event survival essential—as well as a sculptural engineering civic element of pride. I speculate that like the Montreal Olympic Stadium, we will be seeing maintenance and challenges that will bring on unfortunate financial woe now and in the future.

How will it cope with wind, and what will be its eventual lifespan? The tale of who knew what, how scope changes were not reported, and the hidden decisions, is ready for the casebook of all studying project management.

Keep up the investigative reporting, as no one at City Hall seems to have the big picture—nor public purse—truly in mind.

Hugh Kruzel

Why isn't the mainstream media picking up on the scandalous way the City of Victoria has handled the Johnson Street Bridge Replacement Project, as outlined in *Focus* (Jan/Feb 2018)? David Broadland provides a chronology of the scandalous cost overruns, City council cover-ups, engineering problems, and City staff incompetence.

Originally estimated at $40 million, the current estimate is $110 million with the final price tag yet to be determined. To make matters worse, design changes were made to reduce costs, including no budget for "bumpers" or landscaping, reduction in required life span specifications, reduced earthquake resistance, removal of the rail component, etc. Since these amenities and more were part of the original design, the cost overrun is really even more significant. In effect, the City originally budgeted $40 million to buy a Cadillac, and ended up paying $110 million-plus for a motorcycle that may or may not do the basic job.

In particular, why isn't the media outraged at how the City has resisted, thwarted and lied in response to repeated FOI requests by *Focus* over the past five years? Mainstream media should be ashamed that they have stood by silently, while a small independent bimonthly publication has been left to bear the financial burden necessary to conduct a thorough investigative journalism report on such an important issue. It's time now for the mainstream media to amplify the message, so it is heard by everyone, not just the subscribers to an independent local, but exemplary, magazine.

John Amon

I am no engineer, nor a bridge-builder, but when I see patchwork, I can recognize future trouble. As an old-fashioned woman who still does some mending if needed, I know that any worthwhile patching is done in support of the material around it. A hole beside a hole spells danger that one or the other will break away—zip into the one beside it—and the tearing process begins.

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Besides all the money spent, the time overrun, and the folly of the whole design to begin with, whenever (!) this new bridge opens up for usage, I will hopefully no longer live in Esquimalt and need to cross it on a regular basis. I am a strong swimmer, but I would not like to go down with a bunch of metal on top of me.

Gundra Kucy

Bravo for *Times Colonist* editor-in-chief Dave Obee's commitment to provide "context and analysis about news events" (1/28/18). Unfortunately, it's been sadly lacking since the two repair patches bolted onto the new bridge came to the public's attention in early December. Since then, the *TC's* reporting on this project reads like public service announcements: "Existing Johnson Street span to close Saturday, open Sunday about 5 p.m. if all goes well." Obviously, all has not gone well. Where's the context and analysis offering insight into how and why Victorians got stuck with a brand-new $115 million bridge whose signature feature—the rings—is defaced?

In contrast to the *TC's* unfulfilled promise is David Broadland's initial article on the patches, later supplemented online by a second article, with Mayor Lisa Helps' criteria for trustworthy journalism—hard conversations, good reporting, relationship-building, and serving the public good rather than the journalist's interests.

The criterion of serving the public good coincidentally addresses a problem noted by the mayor in her *TC* re-election interview (1/1/18). "We come to conversations with our minds already made up and our positions already established. So there's not room to change our minds." For me, the public is best served by journalism that opens a person's mind on an issue and triggers critical reflection on the thinking and assumptions behind his/her position. The outcome may be a changed mind or, equally important, an unchanged but more insightful and considered position. It's the process behind this outcome that's important. Agreement or disagreement with the journalist is irrelevant.

As for the criterion of hard conversations, was the *Victoria News* interview with JSB project manager Jonathan Huggett (1/31/2018) a hard conversation? No. Was the *TC's* interview with Mayor Helps on her re-election campaign a hard conversation? No. Was Broadland's piece the beginning of a hard conversation? Yes.

On good reporting, all would agree with the mayor that the foundation is the absence of serious factual errors or inaccuracies. Unfortunately, she has provided no examples to support her claim that David's article was deficient in this way.

On the criterion of relationship-building, would a journalist making numerous FOI requests on contentious City issues lose points? In proportion to the resources available at their respective organizations, I wonder what the track record is on making FOI requests for the *Times Colonist* or other journalists in comparison to *Focus* journalists.

The mayor's score, based on these criteria: David untrustworthy, and all other Victoria journalists trustworthy. Possibly because I place weight on the criteria differently, my score was different. The one that I undoubtedly value the same as Mayor Helps, and all other readers, is the absence of serious factual errors or inaccuracies. So let's start there. My ask of the mayor is for her to provide the examples of inaccuracies, to allow David to make any necessary corrections. Then, with an open mind, engage in the hard conversation of how and why Victorians got stuck with a brand-new $115-million bridge where its signature feature—the rings—is defaced?

John Farquharson

What's in a name? I have recently heard discussions concerning what to name Victoria's new bridge. To me it will always be the "Blew Budget Bridge."

Steen Petersen

Will "sunshine" finally come to BC?

Alan Cassels' article makes some cogent points, which are unfortunately diluted by a prominent error. The drug referenced in the central anecdote of the story, Prolia or denosumab, is referred to wrongly as a bisphosphonate drug. Then the link between bisphosphonates and osteonecrosis of the jaw and other risks is played up, and the patient's prescription of denosumab/Prolia accordingly questioned.

The other drugs mentioned (Fosamax, Actonel, Zometa) are indeed bisphosphonates. Denosumab, however, as is handily made obvious by its "-mab" suffix, is a monoclonal antibody, a very large multi-protein-chain biologic drug, a wildly different class of molecule than the bisphosphonates which, as their name implies, are fairly simple, double-phosphonate-containing, small molecules.

It turns out the difference is not great in incidence of osteonecrosis of the jaw in both denosumab and the bisphosphonates (at about 1 to 2 percent, with no statistically significant difference between them). However, it's absolutely essential in critiquing pharmaceuticals and medicine that we avoid inaccurate generalizations.

The remaining thrust of the article (on conflicts of interest arising from pharmaceutical industry payments to doctors) needn't be damaged by the error. However, the Canadian initiative mentioned (openpharma.ca), and similar efforts to shine light on physician payments, while laudable in principle, are arguably far less useful for fixing medicine than the initiative AllTrials (http://www.alltrials.net/), which aims to have all clinical trials reported and their data made available. Achieving this would largely obviate the need to report every muffin given or speaking fee paid to a doctor, since the science could be independently verified on whether the drugs truly work. For a superlative backgrounder on the rationale for AllTrials by one of its founders, Ben Goldacre, read his excellent book *Bad Pharma.*

Samuel Mercer

Alan Cassels responds: Mr Mercer is totally right in pointing out that I was incorrect when I said that denosumab is a bisphosphonate. It isn't, and while much of my article talks of bisphosphonates like Fosamax, Actonel or Zometa, it does appear that denosmuab has some of the same adverse effects of the bisphosphonates. I apologize if I have confused my readers. I applaud Mr Mercer for mentioning openpharma.ca and AllTrials, both very good initiatives that will hopefully make our access to independently verified drug research much easier and bring more transparency to physician-pharmaceutical industry relations.

BC grizzlies

When I came back from the holidays and picked up my copy of *Focus,* I could not believe my eyes, so I had to read the whole article just to make sure. I was ecstatic about the decision of the NDP government to ban the grizzly trophy hunt. It was obviously the right decision, which was long overdue. However, what disturbs me the most about the whole debate are the motivations pro or against that I read in the newspapers and hear on the news. The only two criteria that are usually considered in the discussions, at least from the government side, are always based on the science and the economy.

I am a scientist myself, so I always welcome scientific arguments in support of any decision-making. However, in this particular case,

I strongly feel that these are irrelevant. The trophy hunt is ethically immoral above all other considerations. The fact that the government, or the outfitters legally operating in the province, have been accepting big money from individuals coming to BC to shoot an innocent animal from a safe distance, giving it no chance to defend itself, for the sole purpose of taking home a trophy, is, in my opinion, highly unethical.

Moreover, at least 80 percent of British Columbians have been consistently and vigorously opposing the hunt for many years, while the Liberal government allowed this shameful activity, undemocratically ignoring the position of the vast majority of the people.

In my opinion, ethics and the will of the people are the only criteria which should have been applied to the case of the grizzly bear trophy hunt, regardless of any other scientific or economic argument. I applaud the decision of the NDP government to finally ban the grizzly bear trophy hunt, even though I still doubt that it was made for the right reasons.

Nabhraj Spogliarich

Victoria's new policy on short-term rentals

Pamela Roth's article on Victoria's short-term rentals dilemma (January/February 2018) presents a balanced view of this controversial topic; however, it fails to consider why STRs appear to be exacerbating the housing crisis in every major city around the globe. The new internet-based, unregulated "sharing-economy" business model lies at the heart of the issue. Few governments have been able to exercise their regulatory control or taxation authority over this online lodging-booking platform. The massive expansion of the deregulated global economy over the past two decades, proliferation of off-shore tax-free safe havens, and the rampant growth of investment in a highly speculative asset class such as real estate, has concentrated wealth in fewer and fewer hands. This has eliminated the possibility of earning the decent living required to put a roof over one's head without assuming intolerable debt levels.

Before Airbnb, (the premier "online marketplace and hospitality service" established in 2008), all bed-and-breakfast operators in the City of Victoria were required to obtain a commercial business license to operate as a lodging supplier, and pay appropriate taxes, as hoteliers do. The disruptive digital technology home-sharing enterprise said their business model was simply an intermediary tool to

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link property owners willing to rent unused space to guests interested in alternative if not cheaper accommodations than those provided by hotels. The crux of their argument is this: data on host properties and transactions is confidential information which cannot be shared with any regulatory agency. Consequently, if said authorities wish to exercise control over the home-sharing economy, they must assume the costs of regulating and monitoring the property owners and housing units listed.

New technology offers the means to book temporary use of a room or a home offered by property owners to guests at a suitable price. This, together with the rapid growth of new high-end condos Downtown, serves the interests of developers who sell the units as income-generators. Prospective owners stand to benefit, especially those who seek a financial investment property for part-time personal use. To suggest that City council, which approved the Downtown development permits over the past decade, were unaware that the new units were being used for this purpose, is at best a red herring. Or perhaps just another excuse, like the Johnson Street Bridge fiasco, to remind everyone of their incompetence.

Victoria Adams

On the frontlines of the opioid crisis

The opioid crisis is heart-breaking. The 19-year-old son of a colleague of mine died in his sleep at home in his own bed from an accidental overdose a year ago. The family is still shattered, and likely will be for years. I have a daughter the same age; it could just as easily have been me who lost her child. I feel for all the families whose loved ones have died or are struggling.

I am also a naturopathic physician, and believe that we are missing a few pieces to the puzzle of addiction and recovery that could provide tremendous help and could be addressed quite easily.

The use of opioid painkillers for acute and chronic pain management could be greatly reduced, if not eliminated, by refocusing pain management on non-addictive methods of treatment, including homeopathy, acupuncture and chiropractic. The use of arnica and hypericum as homeopathic remedies given in a specific protocol after surgeries and many injuries would have the potential to drastically lower, or even eliminate, the need for most conventional pain medication. Opioid medication after a back injury was what addicted Ms McBain's son. Very likely a combination of homeopathy and acupuncture for the acute pain, followed by chiropractic, could have prevented his addiction and death. Physicians need to be educated to either start integrating those methods into their clinical practice, or to collaborate with other trained health care providers such as naturopathic doctors, acupuncturists and chiropractors in an open and respectful manner.

I myself underwent a double mastectomy with immediate reconstruction due to breast cancer in 2010 and only needed 2 Tylenols at the end of the first day. No other pain killers were given, although the nurses frequently asked if I wanted morphine. My pain was managed perfectly with homeopathic remedies and relaxation tapes. My daughter had three wisdom teeth removed last year, one impacted, and did not require one single painkiller; it was managed with homeopathy. To those calling this anecdotal evidence: there is a long history of clinical use of arnica, hypericum, and other homeopathic remedies for acute pain management and a small body of good, published research as well, showing effectiveness. Most studies are not done by homeopaths, unfortunately, and don't use the right potency of the remedy and correct frequency of dosing; otherwise, results would be much better. I'm happy to teach anyone interested how to dose correctly to prevent or reduce the use of post-injury and post-surgical painkilling medications. Chronic pain can also be effectively managed with naturopathy, homeopathy, chiropractic, acupuncture, biofeedback, meditation, hypnosis and related methods.

There must be supervised injection sites for obvious reasons. And physiological support for withdrawal symptoms at those sites and all treatment centres. Opioid agonists are an obvious helpful choice, but don't address the neurological damage done by the drugs, and are therefore really only a stop-gap measure. Intravenous amino acids and other nutrients have been used with success in several treatment centres in the US and Mexico, as well as in a number of clinical studies. IV nutrients help deliver amino acids needed to route more neurotransmitters, especially dopamine, directly to the brain, bypassing often-damaged digestive systems. In studies, this has greatly shortened the duration and intensity of withdrawal symptoms from a multitude of addictions, including alcohol, cocaine and heroin. Ms McBain's son could not shake off these physical withdrawal symptoms; this approach might have helped him.

In addition, users should be supplied with high quality nutritional supplements, including high-dose multi-vitamins and minerals, additional chromium to help address blood sugar imbalances, lithium orotate and vitamin D to stabilize mood, and vitex agnus castus capsules to reset dopamine receptors. Clients should also be counselled on the benefits of high-protein, high-fat, low-sugar diets, and provided with food vouchers to buy such foods.

I believe that using such an integrated strategy could greatly help alleviate the addiction crisis by preventing a large part of it in the first place, and by helping to heal the addicted brain.

Dr Anke Zimmermann, ND, FCAH

Sewage and science

David Broadland is absolutely correct (November/December 2017). The fact that the enhanced sewage treatment juggernaut rolls on, with no regional opposition, is the real crime here.

This is especially true when you consider the political sea change since the senior governments of (BC Liberal) Gordon Campbell and (Conservative) Stephen Harper forced the Capital region into an unnecessary and costly enhanced sewage treatment project. Now, BC Liberals have been relegated to official opposition, and the Capital region's own John Horgan is premier of a New Democratic government full of south Island ministers. Meanwhile, Justin Trudeau, who campaigned in 2012 for the "anti-sewage treatment" Liberal candidate and the need for "science-based decision-making," is now Prime Minister. It's profoundly disappointing that neither have moved to re-examine the need for enhanced treatment ordered by the two Capital region adverse former governments.

Perhaps even more disappointing in this new political landscape is the inaction of Green Party leader Andrew Weaver, a "star" scientist who built a career on the impact of greenhouse gases on climate change. Besides hijacking public spending, enhanced sewage treatment will needlessly increase CO_2 emissions during construction and operation. But rather than using his new-found power and influence to lobby for transit improvements over enhanced sewage treatment, Mr Weaver instead tables—again—a ride-sharing bill that does little for daily commuters, but benefits American ride-sharing giants like Uber and Lyft.

As with Site C, there should have been an independent review of the enhanced sewage treatment requirement in the Capital region.

The vast amount of public funds required for this unnecessary project should instead be applied to a regional-based rail transit system. Doing so would not only benefit the region by reducing commuting time and enhancing livability, but the global environment as well by contributing to greenhouse gas reduction.

Dave Nonen

On the relationship between theatre and memory

Monica Prendergast's article stated: "This generation is living longer than any prior one, and so is also suffering with diseases like Alzheimer's at a higher rate."

Dr Stephen Genuis, University of Alberta, has three articles online that indisputably reveal how the current neurological disease epidemic, including Alzheimer's, results from the massive environmentally-dispersed chemical exposures we are all immersed in. It has nothing to do with increased longevity. Just because these diseases show up later in life doesn't mean that's their cause. People in their 40s are often showing early signs.

The Pesticide Action Network North America corroborates this. See "Generation in Jeopardy: How pesticides are undermining our children's health and intelligence."

Pitying the aged distracts us from the political indignation and action needed to change policy. We got angry at, even as we suffered from, asbestos, tobacco and thalidomide. We abolished or severely curtailed their use. Let's summon up the same intelligence and passion to stop all corporate, profit-driven poisoning of our sacred biology. Let's end this toxic exposure epidemic by our grandchildren's generation through abolitionist policy.

Larry Wartels

#MeToo: what's next?

I think the article by Mollie Kaye (January/February 2018) is a welcome note of sanity in a highly-charged MeToo debate which seems to have replaced the real estate market as the most common dinner party conversation.

On that note, I wanted to share with you a recent experience with CBC radio. As you know, announcers always announce a piece of music by a symphony orchestra by saying "conducted by" or "under the direction of" X. The CBC announced a piece performed by the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, but did not say the conductor's name. Since the MSO had a prolific and well-regarded recording oeuvre when Charles Dutoit was the conductor, I enquired and found out that the CBC management has issued a directive that Charles Dutoit's name not be announced and associated with the MSO on air due to the allegations against him, the specifics of which I am not aware. For Dutoit to suddenly become a "non-person" with the CBC struck me as wrong.

Perhaps in 30-40 years time, another Trudeau will be standing in parliament and apologizing for the injustices which occurred when people's careers and reputations were destroyed by mere allegations.

I will be taking the latest *Focus* with me to Sayulita, Mexico next week to read cover to cover.

Tony Beckett

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One nuclear bomb is too many

MARY-WYNNE ASHFORD

Addressing the generational gap in understanding around nuclear disarmament.

It seems unreal that we are facing the possibility of war between two nations that have nuclear weapons. The threat is so great the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* advanced the Doomsday Clock to two minutes to midnight. Two minutes to nuclear armageddon.

Ashford with students at Claremont High School

What seems even more unreal is that while two unpredictable leaders threaten to use nuclear weapons, we also have a *Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons* open for signatures at the United Nations. Most of the world wants an end to the nuclear weapons era but Canada does not plan to sign the *Treaty*.

My colleague, Dr Jonathan Down, told me of his fear that we may see war in the next few months. We agreed that we had to do whatever we could to raise the alarm. We began speaking to churches and service clubs together to raise awareness that the threats, insults and provocations between President Trump and President Kim Jong Un are not just hot air but a prelude to war.

When I spoke of my fears to local high school teachers, they asked me to speak to their students about the context of the current threat and the humanitarian consequences of nuclear war. There is a generational gap in knowledge about nuclear weapons between young people and their parents and grandparents. Those of us who lived through the Cold War remember the existential fear we felt when we learned there were 70,000 nuclear weapons. Public outrage led to meetings between Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev and the beginning of major reductions in nuclear arsenals. Today there are "only" 15,000 nuclear weapons, but 1500 of those are held on high alert, ready to be launched on warning.

The reductions are laudable, but research shows that a limited nuclear exchange of fewer than 100 nuclear bombs of the current size would cause millions of tons of radioactive black soot and dirt to go up to the stratosphere where it would linger as a black cloud for years, blotting out the sun and causing sudden catastrophic drops in temperature on the Earth below. This temperature drop would result in widespread crop failures, and some two billion people facing starvation.

As Jonathan and I planned our presentations for students, we remembered how disturbed and frightened we were in the 1980s, when we first came to grips with the threat of nuclear annihilation. What is different now is that the power of ordinary people—civil society—has led to major treaties being passed at the United Nations: landmines, chemical and biological weapons, and cluster bombs have been banned. The 2017 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) for its work in bringing forward the *Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons*.

Jonathan and I decided that helping young people overcome the feelings of helplessness brought on by the magnitude of the threat we face, and building bonds between students and adults working together would be our major goal. We teach about the suffering and deaths in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and that one bomb is too many. Then we talk about the successes we have had already, and what we can do together right now to prevent a devastating war.

One thing we learned in the Cold War was the power of singing together. Somehow singing "We Shall Overcome" made us feel less alone, less discouraged. We decided to invite singers to join us in our school presentations to offer songs that meant a great deal to us. Students aren't used to singing together, but gradually they join in singing John Lennon's "All we are saying is give peace a chance."

We now know that the small things we did during the Cold War made a difference at a high level. Teachers in Victoria sent hundreds of paper lanterns for peace to the Soviet Union in the 1980s, but we didn't know that our actions would be noticed. Gorbachev wrote in his book, *Perestroika*, that two things affected his thinking about nuclear weapons: his talks with doctors, and the hundreds of thousands of letters he received from children.

Teaching about North Korea is difficult in a climate of fear and provocation, but students must understand the history in order to see alternatives to war and sanctions. The Korean war of 1950-53 ended in a truce, not a peace treaty. The original war was to halt the advance of communism through the peninsula, but after the war, the US continued to station 30,000 troops in South Korea and maintain constant pressure to destabilize the dictatorship in the North. Now, 65 years later, there is still no peace treaty, no agreement of mutual nonaggression.

The US and its allies have agreed to extreme sanctions on North Korea in the hopes that Kim Jong Un will give up his nuclear weapons. The other eight countries that already have them say that we must not allow nuclear weapons in the wrong hands, but the truth is, there are no right hands. We have survived at least five incidents that almost triggered a nuclear holocaust by accident. Our luck will not hold forever. All states must eliminate their nuclear weapons.

The sanctions imposed on North Korea are so devastating that UNICEF estimates they will cause the deaths by starvation of 60,000 children. The country depends upon oil to generate electricity. Without oil, they cannot use the pumps or tractors in the rice fields, transport food from farms to cities, run hospitals or cars. The restrictions on humanitarian aid mean that even the Red Cross cannot provide rubber gloves, scalpel blades, sutures, medications, and blankets.

Sanctions are described as if they were nonviolent diplomacy that could be tried first, and if they failed, military action would be justified. In fact, sanctions are a cruel tool of war by other means.

What is needed is dialogue without preconditions between the US and North Korea, trust-building measures between South and North Korea, denuclearization of the entire Korean Peninsula, and a peace treaty to end the Korean War. The Korean people want peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula, and they have a right to work out the steps needed by themselves. Canada can help by supporting people-to-people exchanges, and ensuring that aid gets through to prevent a tragic humanitarian disaster. And Canada can lead in the abolition of nuclear weapons by signing the *Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons*.

Dr Mary-Wynne Ashford is past co-president of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. In May she will be in North Korea with Women Cross DMZ.

ADVERTISEMENT

Values-based investing offers lower risk and potentially higher returns.

Photo: Tony Bounsall

Blue Heron Advisory Group, left to right: James Spencer, Ashley Camponi, Neil Chappell, Courtney Lance, Hanna Kent, Graham Isenegger

Wouldn't it be wonderful knowing that the companies you invest in are making a positive difference in the world?

This is what Neil Chappell and Graham Isenegger's clients want. That's why these seasoned Investment Advisors and Portfolio Managers dove into researching socially responsible investing (SRI). "What we've seen is that corporations that have high ethical standards and work hard to be sustainable, have historically often performed well financially," says Isenegger. "You don't necessarily have to sacrifice your values to earn good financial returns."

Not having to sacrifice your values for returns is good news; however, Neil and Graham have also found that some traditional forms of SRI are lacking in rigor and performance. And, they are determined to do better for their clients by following the evidence wherever it leads them.

The two professionals review in-depth independent research that allows them to apply stringent environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) screens when assessing investment options. Their screening process allows them to narrow the market to the top 40% of ESG-rated companies. They've also created several actively managed portfolios, which they offer through the Blue Heron Advisory Group at CIBC Wood Gundy. "It's a bit like hand picking an ESG team," suggests Isenegger. The group is currently rounded out by two licensed associates and two administrative assistants.

Chappell explains the Blue Heron methodology further by stressing their focus on clients. "We emphasize positive screening criteria because many clients like to encourage positive social performance and innovation, and avoid problematic business practices. We screen in companies that invest in the health and well-being of their employees, protect biodiversity, and/or create social opportunities. We also use exclusionary screening for clients who want to avoid companies that provide products or services like gambling, civilian firearms, military weapons, adult entertainment, tobacco or genetic engineering."

"We are in a period of energy transition due to various factors including climate change," notes Isenegger. "Carbon taxes, increased regulation, and the emergence of renewables present many risks and opportunities." Certain companies and industries are excluded from the Blue Heron portfolios because they fail to pass stringent environmental screening. These companies or industries could present undue risk in a client's portfolio. Companies involved in scandals or controversy—like lawsuits, protests, accidents, health and safety fines, or allegations of discrimination—may also be rejected in Blue Heron's evaluation process. For instance, one large company passed initial screenings, but failed overall because of human rights abuses and controversies involving biodiversity and toxic emissions.

Those with an analytical bent will especially appreciate the depth of research and analysis that the group employs. "We look at the data and it's often humbling," says Chappell. "Companies you might assume would fare well through the screens often don't."

While the Blue Heron Advisory Group believes strongly in sustainable investing, they feel the most important service they provide clients is comprehensive and ongoing financial planning. Isenegger says that "the 'why' of investing is more important than the 'how.' Context is everything, so knowing our client's needs, worries and dreams is essential." The team works with clients to develop a plan that reflects their goals and values. A key part of this plan is a managed portfolio with investments based on the Blue Heron customized ESG screens.

Gavin and Jessica Duncan, Blue Heron clients since 2014, have this to say: "Graham and Neil have created a portfolio that has shown steady growth while giving us the peace of mind that our dollars are not funding unsavoury practices. Graham and Neil are there every step of the way, always willing to take the time to explain how our investments are doing, and the best options to meet our personal needs." The Duncans believe that "if you have spare cash, you have a responsibility to use it wisely and not blindly invest in companies that are destroying the planet or exploiting others."

Do you know what you own? Let the Blue Heron Advisory Group run your current portfolio through its ESG screens to see if your investments are working in support of your values.

Contact the Blue Heron Advisory Group at 250-361-2284 or email blueheronadvisorygroup@cibc.ca for more information.

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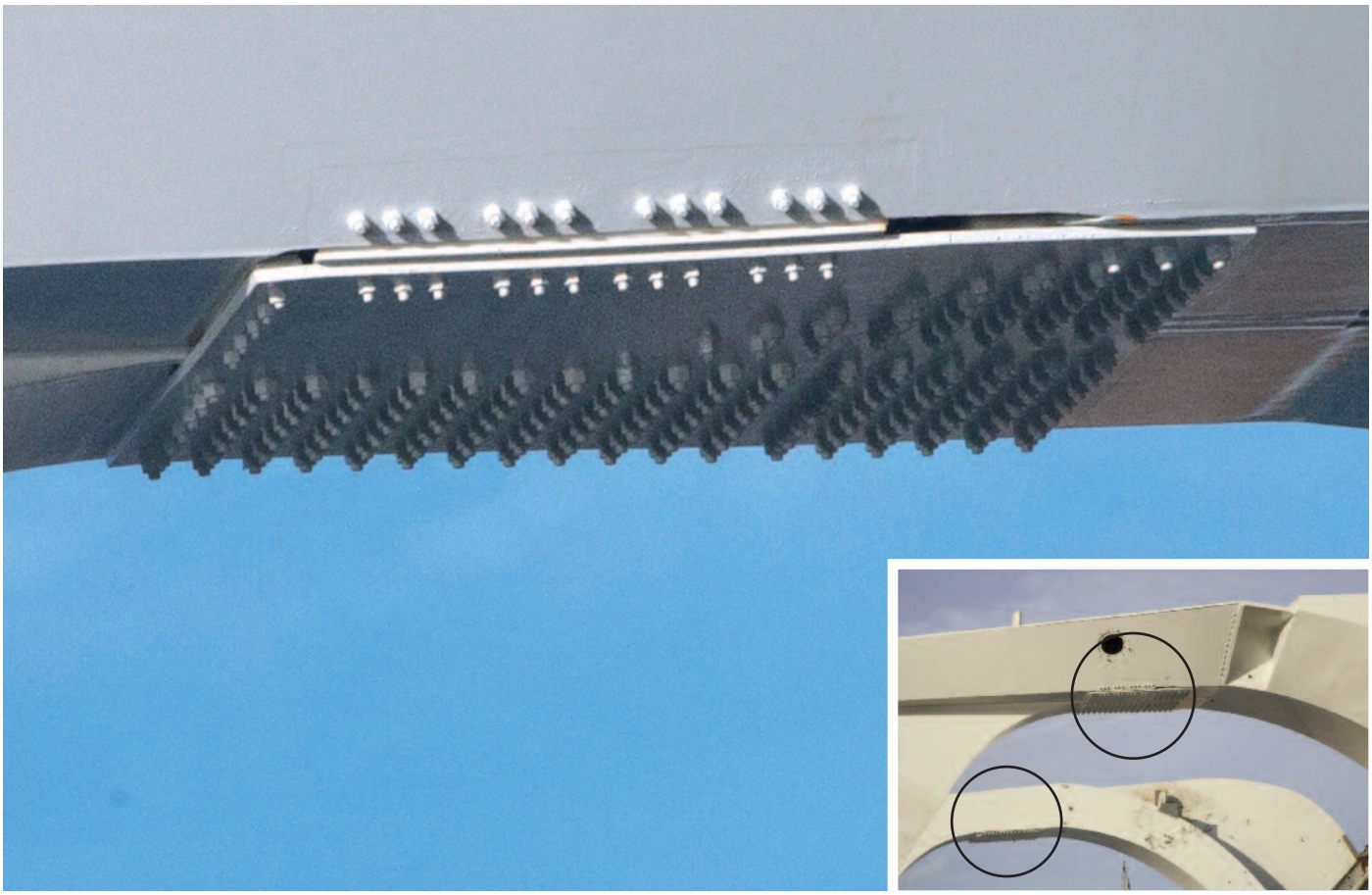
Leslie Campbell 18 Alan Cassels 22 Briony Penn 24 Judith Lavoie 28 Pamela Roth 30

Why are Victoria City councillors accepting a world-class bodge?

DAVID BROADLAND

The City is refusing to provide records that would show who knew what, and when they knew it.



Controversial bolt-on plates on Victoria's brand-new $115 million bridge

Following our story last edition about the surprise appearance of bolt-on plates on the new bridge that Victorians had been promised would be "world-class" and "iconic," the reaction from ordinary people who don't receive a regular cheque from the City of Victoria was consistently forthright. An English bridge designer, who has written about such projects all over the world for the past 10 years noted: "The latest reports from *Focus* cover issues with the bridge's steel fabrication. They highlight the discovery of a problem with the steelwork, which appears to have been covered over with a truly awful-looking bolted plate, a real bodge if ever you see one…*Focus* is quite right to criticize the detail. It's clear from the photographs that nothing this awful should be considered acceptable as part of the finished structure."

On Vibrant Victoria, an online discussion forum, "jonny" noted: "I am absolutely gobsmacked that our NINE FIGURE shiny new bridge has two, seemingly haphazard and last minute, bolted-on steel plates that look like they were envisaged and put together by a 9th grade metalworking student."

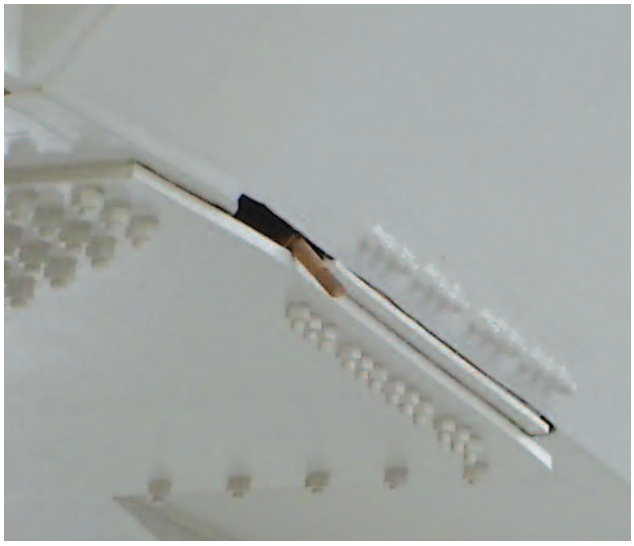
"G-Man" responded, "Couldn't agree more. It makes me want to puke. I could not care less whether or not an engineer says it's okay. The brand new bridge should not have this. It is unbelievable. I am embarrassed as a Victorian." Several days later, G-Man posted a photograph of the bolt-on plate on the north ring (see page 15). Somehow a bolt had worked its way free from somewhere inside the ring and was trying to escape through a large gap between the ring and the bolt-on plate.

Martin Bache, a 40-year veteran of Canada's structural steel fabrication industry, and a project supervisor with Canron in Vancouver before retiring to Victoria, wrote to *Focus* and commented: "I have never seen such an appalling patch." Bache agreed that the plates would "promote corrosion" in the structure. He had contacted EGBC, BC's association of professional engineers, which confirmed that the association's bylaws require a third party independent review of the patches since they are on fracture-critical steel. No such review has been brought forward, or even mentioned, by either the City or the bridge's American designers, Hardesty & Hanover.

SOMEONE'S CHOICE TO OVERLOOK THE PUBLIC INTEREST and accept a defective bridge has saved the companies building the bridge a lot of money, perhaps millions of dollars. Are councillors responsible for this bad decision? Or were they kept in the dark by Project Director Huggett?

I covered the initial response from City Hall in a second story posted at focusonvictoria.ca. To put that response as succinctly as possible, the City claimed our story contained "serious factual errors and inaccuracies," but was unwilling—or unable, to say what those errors and inaccuracies were.

On January 25, Project Director Jonathan Huggett gave council his quarterly update on the troubled project. Huggett commented on the bolt-on plates: "There has been this inference by some that somebody found a piece of scrap steel, slapped it on as an afterthought, and put a few bolts in place. Whoever makes those statements clearly has no experience in engineering. As engineers we take great pride in our work. Nothing happens quickly or suddenly, and without due process and proper sign-off."



A rusty bolt trying to escape the new bridge. Photo by G-Man.

The "pride" Huggett claims has gone into this project is hard to see when you examine closely the two patches on the new bridge. And, if they are any indication of the pride with which the rest of the bridge has been built, Victorians could be in for more embarrassment. But it's Huggett's claim that "nothing happens…without due process" that is the focus of my attention this time.

What has become evident is that Huggett may not have informed anyone at City Hall about the problem that led to the bolt-on plates, thus making it impossible to consider options that would have prevented the delivery of a defective bridge.

With Mayor Helps and Huggett refusing to respond to our questions, *Focus* requested relevant records under access to information law. So far, Huggett and the City have been uncooperative and *Focus* has filed a complaint with the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

In my initial story I raised these questions: Were City councillors informed about the situation that led to the bolt-on plates? If so, were they given any options?

It's vital to have answers to these questions. The plates reflect an unacceptable diminishment of the expected quality of the bridge. According to Huggett, people are comparing the bridge to scrap metal. The plates also reflect a lower-cost solution to the problem they were intended to address than a proper refabrication, but the parties building the bridge would have been responsible for any additional cost. Someone's choice to overlook the public interest and accept a defective bridge has saved the companies building the bridge a lot of money, perhaps millions of dollars. Are councillors responsible for this bad decision? Or were they kept in the dark by Project Director Huggett?

Thus far, the only indication of what happened that led to the bolt-on plates has been the minimal response from Huggett that I reported in my first story, and a letter from Hardesty & Hanover's Keith Griesing sent to the City on January 8, shortly after our story was published.

After reading our story, Griesing "felt it would be helpful if I gave you a brief summary of why those plates are there and how their use came to be." Griesing is the project's engineer of record.

Griesing disagreed with our characterization of the circumstance that led to the bolt-on plates as a "design flaw." His letter stated: "There was no 'design flaw' by Hardesty & Hanover nor any other of the City consultants involved; it was assembly by the fabricator that did not conform to the design plan requirements nor to the applicable detailing and fabrication standards required in the specifications" that led to the need for the bolt-on plates.

Griesing's need to make a distinction between a "design flaw" and "assembly by the fabricator" is understandably important to Hardesty & Hanover. If the bolt-on plates resulted from some error made by Hardesty & Hanover, they could become defendants in a legal suit if City councillors realize a world-class bodge has been foisted on City taxpayers. If the cause was solely attributable to an error made by the fabricator, then the company the City contracted to build the bridge—PCL—would be the defendant.

But Hardesty & Hanover's concern is not equal to the public interest. Just because Griesing claims Hardesty & Hanover aren't responsible for the weakness in the rings that required the plates doesn't mean the City hasn't received a defective bridge. City councillors ought to be focussed on which companies the City should consider suing, rather than resorting to talking points designed to relieve them of any responsibility for their failure to protect the public interest.

And just because Huggett tells City councillors there was "no design error" doesn't mean his apparent concealment of the issue isn't an issue. Councillors need to examine carefully the role Huggett played in the delivery of a world-class bodge.

In his letter to councillors, Griesing attributes the need for the bolt-on plates to errors made by the Chinese company ZTSS, hired by PCL to fabricate the moveable part of the bridge. Griesing states: "In the course of our routine quality inspections in the steel fabrication plant in China, [PCL's] quality control team [Atema] discovered a violation of fabrication and welding standards in the particular area

in question. This determination was confirmed by the City's Quality Oversight consultant."

According to Huggett, this discovery was made on December 9, 2016. What was found? Huggett provided *Focus* with a single sentence from Atema's report. It stated: "Weld access holes in MW1 and MW3 to MF1 and TF1 at MW2 were unnecessary, not clearly detailed and may not have been evaluated to proper fatigue design category, and not fabricated to code requirements".

That's largely incomprehensible to most of us, but here's the essential part: Atema found "unnecessary" weld access holes in steel parts close to where the bolt-on plates were eventually added. Weld access holes are openings into otherwise closed chambers inside the rings that allow welders to complete welds within those closed chambers. Why would ZTSS cut "unnecessary" holes if it didn't need them?

With Huggett refusing to provide any information, I sought insight from the aforementioned Martin Bache, who has 40 years of experience in heavy steel fabrication.

Bache described the process that would have been used for determining where such holes are needed: "Weld access holes in fracture-critical members must be designed by the Engineer of Record [Griesing]. Competent detail draftspersons would be expected, during preparation of the shop drawings, to identify closed chambers where the EOR may have forgotten to show on his plans weld access holes without which the required welding cannot be performed. They would then issue an RFI [request for information] pointing this out, and asking the EOR how they should proceed."

According to Bache, then, Griesing would ultimately be responsible for the design of every weld access hole that was required, since every steel member in the rings was designated "fracture-critical."

Griesing has told the City that the fabricator was responsible for the weld access hole violations. In that case, the bad holes wouldn't have appeared on the shop drawings Griesing was required to approve. That means they should have been discovered quickly by any robust quality assurance (QA) program. If found quickly, those holes would still be accessible and could be fixed immediately. Bache noted: "Under what we must imagine would be rigorous QA on this second attempt to fabricate a bridge, we would expect an error to be spotted very soon after the occurrence."

But according to Griesing, "Because of its location in a critical area of the structure, this non-conformance was particularly difficult to correct."

Why, exactly? If the QA teams were as diligent as Huggett claimed in his quarterly reports, why would "unnecessary" access holes just cut by fabricators end up being "particularly difficult to correct."

From what Huggett has told *Focus*, we know that Hardesty & Hanover's decision on how to address these unnecessary holes was delayed for *six to seven months*. During that time, fabrication of the bridge continued.

It appears that Hardesty & Hanover dithered on fixing the unnecessary weld access holes, which were made inaccessible by subsequent work and couldn't be fixed. Did Griesing forget to tell someone to do something?

Bache wrote: "What amazes me is the tremendous time gap between the Atema non-compliance report and the attempted fixes. It sounds as though no one at Hardesty & Hanover could decide what to do, but the work continued and the bridge was shipped anyway to try to keep to a schedule."

Griesing's explanation to the City noted: "The design team and fabrication team designed and reviewed numerous mitigation options. We even consulted two internationally known experts in fabrication and welding for their input. After reviewing all options, the project team unanimously agreed that the bolted plates were the best option, all factors considered."

Griesing, obviously, did not factor in jonny or G-Man. Maybe he should have. G-Man and jonny seem to represent the values and priorities of ordinary Victorians better than either Huggett or Helps.

It wasn't until after the rings had arrived in Victoria, late last summer, that large holes were chopped in the rings and plates bolted over the holes. The need for these large holes is unclear. Were they needed to allow someone to get inside the rings so bolts could be inserted from the inside and tightened? If so, what happened to the tightener? That work was done at Point Hope Shipyard in Victoria.

Griesing's letter provided no explanation for why a fix wasn't made immediately in December 2016 when the unnecessary access holes would still have been accessible. So while Huggett and Griesing have successfully focussed the City on shooting the messenger, more important questions that need to be answered are being ignored.

Let me, just for the sake of thoroughness, offer an alternative story to that being told by Huggett, Griesing and Helps. Let's start with Atema's report. Although we've been provided with only one sentence from that report, let's presume that sentence is the whole report and that Atema did find weld access holes that were unnecessary and that those unnecessary holes are the entire reason bolt-on plates were required. All of those assumptions are leaps of faith, but let's jump. In that case, PCL would have been responsible for the cost of any refabrication necessary to meet the City's agreed-upon specifications defined in the contract. If the City had been given all the facts about this when it happened, the City would surely have insisted on refabrication rather than accepting a bridge that would forever wear "truly awful-looking" bolt-on plates.

But wait. According to Griesing, the City *did* know about the issue. In his letter, Griesing wrote, "City Staff was fully involved in arriving at the best solution, particularly with respect to public safety, cost and schedule impacts."

The "was" in that sentence suggests a single person from the City was involved, but we don't know for sure. Who did Griesing mean by "City Staff"? Did he mean just Huggett? Or did he mean Huggett and other people at City Hall? Again, we don't know the answer to this yet, because Huggett has refused to respond to a legal request for his records on the issue, and Helps won't respond to questions. But this is vital to understand because if Huggett didn't inform anyone else at the City of Victoria, we would have to ask why he kept that information from his client.

Until we see Huggett's record of communication on the plates, no judgement can be made as to his conduct. But at this point, with Huggett appearing to have not properly informed his client, the City may need to seek advice about the implications of the plates from someone not involved in the project.

Griesing's claim that it wasn't a "design flaw" that led to the bolt-on plates is an open question until detailed information about what Atema found, and why it took six or seven months for Griesing to act, is released.

But there is a broader issue that deserves comment. In one sense there is no question that the bolt-on plates are the direct consequence of a design flaw. The design flaw was the open rings themselves. The choice of that particular design approach to creating a movable bridge made the structure unnecessarily complex, difficult to build and overly expensive. Of the three companies originally bidding for the project, two rejected the open-ring design and based their bids on designs that had proven track records. Kiewit's engineers had concluded that the open rings posed "a fundamentally high risk and expensive design approach." Bizarrely, the City's scoring

of the bid proposals actually penalized Kiewit and Walsh for *not* using the risky design.

As part of PCL's bid, Hardesty & Hanover embraced this risky design. Victoria taxpayers have been paying the costs ever since. For example: two additional years of construction are attributable to difficulty in fabricating the open rings and fitting them to the trusses. Those extra two years of construction have made people in Victoria frustrated. That sense of frustration, especially in an election year, is not something politicians like Helps and her councillors want to aggravate with further delays. Their public promise to deliver the bridge by such-and-such a date meant that if any problem arose that would cause further delay, councillors were going to favour whatever solution was quickest. They telegraphed that to Huggett and Griesing. So that's what councillors got, but in spades.

So when Griesing tells councillors that the bolt-on plates are not the result of a design flaw, he's overlooking his company's responsibility for promoting a design that other engineers warned the City not to build. Hardesty & Hanover's risky and hard-to-build design created a whole chain of connected events that led inevitably to the bolt-on plates.

Don't take my word for it. Last summer, in a rare moment of self-reflection in which councillors had an opportunity to openly consider why the project had encountered such difficulties, Councillor Pam Madoff offered the following: "I remember very specifically having this conversation [with the bridge's designers and engineers] about the mechanics, you know, the—in simplistic terms—the cogs, the wheels, how it was going to lift. I remember at the time saying, 'Is this basically just a larger version of the Meccano sets that we played with as kids, in terms of its actual mechanical operation?' And, again, that was the assurance. To me it comes down to: how far does one have to go? We felt like we asked the right questions at the time. It turns out they may not have been the right answers." In response, Huggett told councillors: "You were not given good advice."

A question councillors might ask themselves right now: Why are we still accepting bad advice? Perhaps a sloppily-executed sign with those words on it could be hung from each of the bolt-on plates. With or without such signs, though, each time the bridge lifts and the bolt-on plates descend to the level of pedestrians waiting for the bridge to reopen, those present will be warned of the bridge's dubious origins.

David Broadland is the publisher of *Focus*.

Focus presents: The Laser at Ross Bay

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Laser treatments give quick, impressive results

Colette Polard RN and Dr. Gregg Congdon DPM

For over six years Dr. Gregg Congdon and Colette Pollard have been working with the Cutera Genesis Plus Laser. Besides revolutionizing foot care—from fungal nails to musculoskeletal problems—they've discovered how well it works for other issues.

Nurse Colette says the most typical response from long-suffering patients is "Where have you been?!"

Take plantar fasciitis, for instance. Patient Diane had heel pain so intense that it was interfering with her daily activities. She tried physiotherapy but after a few sessions thought it wasn't going to work fast enough to make her upcoming holiday enjoyable. As the active 70-year-old says, "What's the point in going to Hawaii if you can't go out and walk around?"

That led her to consult with Dr. Congdon who explained why and how laser treatments might be a good choice for her. "I appreciated Dr. Congdon's listening skills and his understanding about my concerns. He was very good at explaining the theory behind laser treatment, how it works at a cellular level, how the energy from the laser penetrates deep into tissue." Diane, wanting to treat it "aggressively" because of her trip, now a month away, booked two treatments a week.

Treatments were done by Nurse Colette, who Diane describes as knowledgeable, personable and enthusiastic. The laser was used for about 15 minutes followed by foot massage. "It was simple, quick, gentle and done professionally," says Diane.

Most importantly, she was thrilled with the results and had no problem spending much of her time in Hawaii comfortably on her feet.

Diane is so impressed with the way laser worked for her heel, she says she'd go back for laser sessions for any soft tissue pain. "It doesn't just deal with the symptoms; it's therapeutic; it actually repairs the tissue."

Patient Laurie is a good example of how the laser works on skin problems. In her 70s, she acts as a caregiver to her mother. She knew that she was looking very tired and thought laser sessions might brighten up her skin in time for a Christmas trip to visit family. After three treatments, people were saying "You're looking good!"

Since then, Laurie has returned for treatments to deal with large pores and sun damage, and in both cases she's seen significant improvement.

Colette and Dr. Congdon have many other examples of patients they've helped—from age 3 to 97. Results are usually seen after three treatments, spread one to two weeks apart. Generally four to six treatments suffice, says Dr. Congdon. With rosacea, however, results can be seen after one treatment.

Laser treatment also makes quick work of warts on hands or feet. The wavelength of light emitted by the laser is absorbed by the wart and converted into thermal energy, thereby destroying it.

Fungal nails can be unsightly and contagious, so are also a cause of some embarrassment. Colette says the most common response after a few laser treatments is "Why doesn't everyone know about this?!"

Besides plantar fasciitis, other muskulo-skeletal issues such as injuries of the foot and ankle, post-operative pain and swelling, stress fractures, tendinitis, and shin splints all respond well. "The laser is revolutionizing the practice of podiatry," says Dr. Congdon.

For foot issues, Dr. Congdon will develop a customized treatment plan, using all possible diagnostic and treatment modalities—laser, but also conservative care and surgery—to alleviate your foot or ankle pain. Routine footcare (nail trimming, corns, calluses, and lesion debridement) is also provided.

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Development beside Gonzales Hill Regional Park raises alarm

LESLIE CAMPBELL

Is the CRD failing to steward its only regional park in the core of the city?

The property adjacent to Gonzales Hill Regional Park for which variances are being sought by the developer of a single-family home

Along with the daffodils, new lawn signs condemning "overdevelopment" are sprouting up in abundance in Fairfield and Oak Bay neighbourhoods. Developers seem to be finding lots that have been ignored for decades or tearing down older homes to put up something grander. Churches are selling out to condo developers (Rockland's Truth Centre), or developing their own "excess" property for affordable rental housing (Oak Bay United).

While the condo and apartment projects add density and sometimes greater affordability to help justify the changing face of a neighbourhood, the many new single-family homes do not. Even though the battles are mostly fought on a case-by-case basis, there's a cumulative impact on neighbourhoods: they look and feel different.

As citizens try to modify or halt impending changes to their neighbourhood, they come face-to-face with bureaucracy. People who usually mind their own business and respect authorities blossom into activists, attending City Hall and CRD meetings, diving deep into archival research, organizing meetings and social media. While an engaged citizenry is a good thing, some unfortunately come away soured on local government, skeptical that any justice or sensibleness comes out of these bureaucracies.

One proposed new development lies adjacent to Gonzales Hill Regional Park, a charming, bluffy paradise with stunning ocean views in multiple directions. The native satin flower can be seen between rock bluffs in early spring; quail are seen regularly. Though mostly left *au naturel*, atop is perched the Gonzales Observatory, its whiteness rising from the rock like a Greek villa and housing the office of The Land Conservancy of BC.

Gonzales Hill Park is the only regional park in the City of Victoria—and it's right on the border between Victoria and Oak Bay. At 1.8 hectares, it's small, but within walking distance of many local residents. CRD stats show 49,060 visitors in 2016.

An adjacent, undeveloped, oblong 11,255-square-foot lot that lies along the park's north border was purchased in 2016 by Walter and Karen Madro after the former owner died. Because she had left the lot in its natural state, it could be mistaken as being part of the park.

The proposed 4000-square-foot house at 1980 Fairfield Place will change that perception. Much of the natural rock will be blasted and removed to construct a house with three levels (officially "1.5 storeys plus basement"), connected by an elevator. Plans show a three-car garage, wine cellar, games and fitness rooms. Despite blasting deep into the rock to create the lower level, it will loom high above its surroundings, particularly the neighbours already below the rocky hill. Six to eight small Garry oaks will be removed.

Residents in the area began hearing about the development when Zebra Group, on behalf of the Madros, showed those closest to the lot initial plans last August. Louis Horvat, an architectural technologist with Zebra, told *Focus*, "We've welcomed the neighbours to come speak to us. We contacted all who wrote letters to the City's Board of Variance asking them to meet with us. Only three contacted us." Horvat says the plans have gone through about eight sets of changes, all to minimize neighbours' concerns. "We really have made an effort to mitigate any concerns."

A Board of Variance hearing scheduled for January 25 to consider the Madros' request for five variances to the R1-G zoning of the lot was adjourned to March 22 because the neighbours and CRD Parks Committee Vice Chair Ben Isitt complained about the short, 10-day notice.

Since then, neighbours and park lovers have informed themselves more, spoken to officialdom, and organized towards protecting the park. The Madros, meanwhile, have reduced requested variances to two: one asking for a bigger total floorspace than allowed under the zoning; the other to build about 30 feet closer to the rear border.

ON FEBRUARY 21, CRD DIRECTOR BEN ISITT attempted to get the CRD Parks Committee to weigh in against the Madros' requested variances at the March Board of Variance (BOV) hearing. In introducing his motion, Isitt said, "This is probably my favourite destination for urban hikes, and I think many Victoria and Oak Bay residents would feel the same way."

His motion was to have the Parks Committee urge the CRD Board to communicate to the City of Victoria's Board of Variance that it

> "I THINK IT'S INDISPUTABLE THAT THIS DEVELOPMENT, if the variances were granted, would have a substantial negative impact on the use and enjoyment of Gonzales Hill Regional Park by park visitors."—*Councillor Ben Isitt*

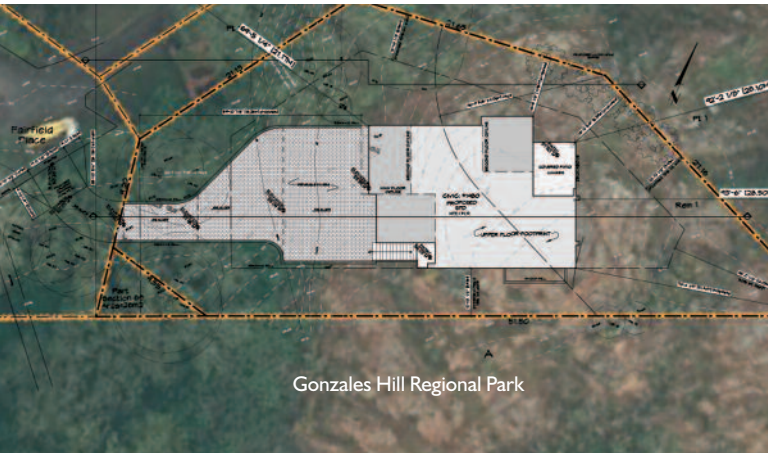

IMAGE: ZEBRA GROUP

Plan view of the proposed home. Lot lines are orange.

was concerned about the effect of the requested variances on the adjacent park.

Isitt's main argument was that a development on the border of this particular park, because it is so small and central, is more impactful than a similar development would be along the borders of the CRD's other regional parks, which are far larger—like Thetis or Sooke Hills Wilderness Park or Elk and Beaver Lake Parks in Saanich. "The relative impact is out of proportion to what we would see elsewhere," said Isitt.

The proposed house, he noted, would obliterate "a highly cherished view looking to the north…[to] Haro Strait and the San Juan Islands… I think it's indisputable that this development, if the variances were granted, would have a substantial negative impact on the use and enjoyment of Gonzales Hill Regional Park by park visitors."

He urged the CRD committee to provide additional comment to the one staff had already submitted to the BOV, "which indicated the CRD had no opinion on the application." A CRD Parks staff report on the matter noted, "The main focus for visitors to Gonzales Hill Regional Park is the view from the bluffs to the south…rather than north;" and concluded the variances "would not result in adverse effects on park visitors when compared with the construction of a house on the property as currently allowed under the City of Victoria's zoning bylaws."

Seven neighbourhood members and two spokespersons for the developer made presentations that day. Zebra's Horvat explained the two variances being requested—one for total floor space, and one for the rear setback—and how the shape and topography of the site made them necessary. He said, "we feel we have produced a design that meets with our clients' needs, minimizes the impact on the neighbours, and had the least amount of impact on the site and surrounding area."

Liane O'Grady, who lives near the park, took issue with Zebra's assertion: "It may meet his client's wants for a larger, grander house. It may maximize the profit, but it compromises the interests of the general public and all the people who live in the area." Showing a slide of the property, she continued, "All of what you see here above would be destroyed, and it would detract from the overall experience in the park…"

Scott Chapman who lives just below the high bluff on which the Madros house will be built, told the CRD Parks Committee: "The granting of both or either of these variances on the size of the house and the setback will intrude massively on the park, altering this space forever for future residents and users, and it also severely intrudes on the sunlight and shadowing on the adjacent property owners who expect that the bylaws for building be upheld, especially in this very sensitive region. "

Cheryl Shoji, who, with Brad Atchison, lives on the west side of the lot, called her presentation "The Rock—the Jewel of the Hill." Noting how it provides habitat for quail and other birds, as well as some rare plant species, she said, "[it] should not be flattened and destroyed for the pleasure of a single family home."

Atchison, who has a post-graduate degree in biology as well as an MBA, told the Committee that even though he was "the most impacted neighbour," he and his wife were willing to have the house move 66 feet closer to them. He implied this would be better for the Garry oak ecosystem. "In urban landscapes, the preservation of these unique biodiversity islands is critically important…On the basis of climate change alone—which the CRD views as the most important governance and action imperative—the region needs an intact Garry oak forest ecosystem." He suggested that the property owner would be "blasting away at least $400,000 of an ancient, panoramic landform with spiritual value to produce rubble."

Alternate Director and City of Victoria Councillor Jeremy Loveday also supported Isitt's motion. He referred to a survey reported on earlier at the meeting which "showed that for those who don't attend regional parks, the second highest reason that they don't go to those parks is because they're too far. For many Victorian residents, Gonzales Hill is the only regional park that they frequently attend, and for some it is the only regional park that they can access. These facts all lead me to think that it's perfectly reasonable for this committee to take a position on this application as we are a directly affected neighbour."

But the Chair of the Regional Parks Committee, David Screech, mayor of View Royal, disagreed. He took issue with the matter even being on the agenda, feeling it inadvisedly "politicized" a decision that should be left to staff. "This is a City of Victoria decision. It's not a CRD decision," he argued. "Variances have nothing to do with us, and the Board of Variance is supposed to be a unique, independent body that does not suffer from political interference. To me, this is political interference. Just on that basis, I can't support it."

Isitt had also pointed out that not only is Gonzales Hill Park the only regional park within the Victoria/Oak Bay municipalities, but that residents of those two cities contribute about one-third of all park funds, but have only 0.015 percent of the land base of regional parks located within their municipal borders.

In response, Screech said: "The simple fact is that the vast majority of the users of regional parks come from Victoria, Oak Bay, and Saanich. It follows that those municipalities would be paying a higher proportion of it. I don't feel that Victoria's hard done by it."

When Isitt tried to respond, Screech said, "No, we don't need to debate it, I'm the chair and I get the last word. That's my response to your comments."

The vote was called; it was tied, 4 to 4 (Price, Screech, Kasper, and Seaton opposed; Isitt, Loveday, Williams, Plant for) which meant Chair Screech got to call it. The motion was defeated.

THAT DEFEAT NATURALLY DISMAYED the other neighbours of Gonzales Hill Park. They had hoped the CRD would be a powerful ally standing against the variances because of its impact on Gonzales Hill Park and park users. It was also a rude awakening: it seemed the CRD couldn't be bothered protecting this beloved park.

A January 25 letter from General Manager of Parks & Environmental Services Larisa Hutcheson to Fairfield Place resident Atchison had bolstered this judgement. In response to Atchison's letter pleading with the CRD to take some interest and at least be at the BOV hearing, Hutcheson stated: "After careful consideration, in staff's view the requested changes would not significantly impact the experience of park users when compared with the existing permitted construction of a single-family dwelling on that lot."

Atchison questions the "careful consideration," arguing that the CRD needs to conduct a scientific Environmental Impact Assessment along with a park user survey to really understand the development's impact.

Atchison also criticizes the CRD for rejecting a proposal of the Madros in late 2016 to gain access to their property from the Gonzales Hill Park parking lot, which, according to Rus Collins of Zebra Design, would have reduced the amount of blasting, and minimized the environmental impact. He wrote in a submission to the BOV that the Madros, in exchange, "were willing to donate a portion of their property to the park and work out a covenant agreement to protect the trees at the Fairfield Place end of their site." Zebra's Horvat also assured *Focus* that that access would have been over grass and broom and was "the least affecting for the habitat."

The CRD, through Communications Senior Manager Andy Orr, told *Focus*, "Access through the parking lot was declined because the request would reduce available parking by one spot. Parking is already limited at the park. The request for use of the parking space was for the construction of a driveway across the rocky bluff and meadow within the park. This request was determined to adversely affect the park." Isitt told *Focus* he too was not in favour of an easement through the park.

Isitt plans to try again to get the CRD to voice concern when the whole Board meets on March 14. Once again, the neighbours will attend and speak in support of the motion.

The subsequent important date for them, and the Madros, is March 22, when the City's Board of Variance will consider the two requested variances—one for an additional 769 square feet of total floor space (above the allowed 3229), and one for a 29.75-foot reduction in setback from its rear border. Isitt said, "A bigger house [than zoning allows for] will have more of an impact on the park."

But Zebra, on behalf of its client, will explain at the hearing that the lot imposes "hardships" because of its irregular shape and a very steep grade in sections due to a 30-foot ascent from Fairfield Place to the top of the hill. It will also point to the report of Julie Budgen, a professional biologist and environmental planner with Corvidae Environmental Consulting Inc. She wrote, "Considering the biophysical features, habitat and available information, Corvidae is of the opinion the proposed project is best sited on the rock outcrop. Locating the project at this location will minimize the overall impact to the existing wooded area."

Every municipality in BC has a Board of Variance (BOV), as mandated under the *Local Government Act*. It is a quasi-judicial body made up of volunteer members appointed by City Council, but independent of it. As the City website explains: "If a hardship is established, the Board may grant the minimum variance that it believes is necessary to alleviate the hardship. However, the Board may deny the variance request if it feels that the proposed variance would substantially affect the use and enjoyment of a neighbouring property, harm the natural environment or defeat the purpose of the Zoning Regulation Bylaw."

Minutes from past BOVs are on the City's website, and it is easy to scan through them and notice that most requested variances are unanimously approved.

The City states the BOV must be "persuaded that the present zoning creates an undue hardship unique to the property in question." In one case where a variance was denied, the minutes state, "Board is sympathetic to time, money and material waste—although cannot consider these as hardships." The Board seems to give weight to neighbours' opinions, but even when neighbours show up to complain, variances are often approved. The BOV's final deliberations are carried out in closed sessions and all decisions are final; there is no appeal.

Currently chaired by Andrew Rushforth, one of the BOV's other four members is Rus Collins, principal designer and owner of Zebra Group, the developer of the Madros' property. He will recuse himself from the deliberations on this property. But for Atchison, it's still a bit too cozy to not potentially influence the BOV.

He and other citizens exposed to the BOV process feel it is time for some serious revisions. One Rockland citizen, about a different development, noted in an exasperated email to *Focus*, "The BOV has no accountability and there is no oversight. Who ensures they comply with the BOV bylaw? Who defines 'minor' variance, who defines 'hardship?'"

The City of Victoria too has expressed concern about the Board of Variance process. On February 8, City council unanimously passed a resolution (moved by Councillors Isitt and Madoff) to the Union of BC Municipalities to ask "the provincial government to review the provisions of the *Local Government Act* relating to Boards of Variance and consider amendments to ensure that the issues of public accountability, transparency and local democracy are upheld." The prelude to this motion noted that "deliberations of local Boards of Variance provide minimal opportunities for public comment on the requested variances, and provide no role for comment from the elected council of a municipality or the board of a regional district in unincorporated areas."

Even if the Madros' variances are denied, it's doubtful that neighbours will be happy with the situation. Virtually any house on that site will reduce the privacy of neighbours, involve noisy blasting and construction, and block some views from the park. But it's one of very few official avenues they have to speak against it.

WHY DIDN'T THE CRD BUY THE LAND itself? It would have enlarged Gonzales Hill Park in a significant way, providing more of a wildlife corridor, retaining views, and certainly keeping the neighbours and numerous park users happy.

The lot in question was listed at $1 million, but there is plenty of money in the CRD's Land Acquisition Fund, which gets an injection of about $4 million every year through a $20 levy on all CRD households. In the past two

years, land purchases totalling $2.62 million have been made, but a healthy fund remains—and grows annually— at least until 2019 when it's up for review. It can be used for no other purpose than park land purchases.

Focus asked the CRD why it hadn't bought the land. An emailed response from the communications manager stated: "The Oak Bay/Victoria part of the Capital Region was not one of the priority areas of interest for park land acquisition. Details about specific land acquisitions are confidential."

Interviewed in his home at the base of the steep hill on which the Madros will build, Atchison said it is a shame that the CRD did not purchase the lot when the opportunity presented itself. The CRD's land acquisition strategy report notes that "To be effective, the land acquisition strategy needs to account for opportunistic acquisition of important lands."

Atchison told *Focus* he'd lead a fundraising campaign in the community, though he believes the CRD should pay for part of it, with the City of Victoria helping. The CRD should, if necessary, even expropriate the lot, he said; and the Madros should be "made whole," by which he means reimbursed for their lot at fair market value.

While it seems unlikely, he hasn't given up hope yet.

Atchison is clearly disgusted with the CRD's lack of good stewardship of Gonzales Hill Park, noting among other things, "They have spent squat" on the park's maintenance.

However, he is most vociferous in his condemnation of the governing body's disengagement around the zoning issue. As he stated in a letter to Screech, "the way the CRD has reacted to-date in handling this situation reinforces, unfortunately, the commonly-held perception of the CRD as an unaccountable, unelected local government, largely unresponsive to community needs with a costly staff complement of about 1200 people."

He and his neighbours are now linking up with concerned citizens in other Fairfield, Rockland, and Oak Bay neighbourhoods to fight what they see as disrespectful "overdevelopment."

Leslie Campbell lives within walking distance of Gonzales Hill Park.

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Photo by Tony Bounsall

Left to right: Amberly Wilson, Ruby Popp, Gail Perkins, Alicia Pearce

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Registered massage therapist Sally Gardner has relied on Gail's bookkeeping for over 20 years. "I like Gail's values. And she's clear and concise and always gets back to me right away if I call with a question. I've always felt confident and comfortable with her—and I recommend her to friends who are also pleased."

Gail and her team members work with many professionals who operate small businesses. She can advise those running such endeavours on the benefits of incorporation and assist them to incorporate if desired. Recently welcomed to Gail's team is Amberly, who with 15 years of hospitality experience, greets clients with a warm smile and cheery disposition on the telephone, and helps keep everything organized.

Qualified bookkeepers—and there are three of them at Gail K. Perkins—are detail-oriented, thorough, methodical and precise. They are also up to date with changes to CRA taxation regulations. Having one oversee your small business' finances or just take care of the payroll for a caregiver for your elders means you'll sleep easy, knowing that your taxes and contributions are all paid on time and correctly—and that you aren't missing any possible deductions (e.g. on your vehicle, entertaining, or home office).

"Over the past 25 years," says Gail, "I have built my business by providing a quality service to my clients and my best clients are ones who understand the value in having good accounting records. We are as efficient as we can be without compromising the integrity of the data. To me, there is just no other way." Fixing mistakes, she notes, is always a bigger challenge than doing things right from the start—especially where Canada Revenue Agency is concerned.

"We like to keep our clients on the good side of CRA to avoid penalties and interest. These are not deductible, whereas fees for good bookkeeping are," says Gail.

Besides the fact that one late payment can cost more than her services, Gail works to make her service affordable in other ways. "We can show you how to organize your paperwork to minimize your bookkeeping fees. We'll send e-mail reminders about upcoming tax filings—and even deliver your remittance cheques directly to each agency for you."

On the personal tax front, Gail's team looks at the whole picture for each client, offering ways to maximize savings. While off-the-shelf software now enables people to file their own tax returns, it doesn't optimize things like pension-splitting for spouses, says Gail, who can also advise about caregiver credits and capital gains, and evaluate which spouse should claim medical expenses and donations.

"We also help guide families through the taxable implications and what needs to be filed when a loved one dies," says Gail. Final tax returns need to be filed, eligibility for death benefits need to be determined and applied for, as well as ensuring the sale of the principal residence is included in the return. It's helpful to have someone like Gail who knows the rules around death and taxes, overseeing the bureaucratic details during what is likely a difficult time.

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"Drug holidays" and deprescribing

ALAN CASSELS

The growing movement to wind back excess medication.

Johanna Trimble knew something wasn't right with her mother-in-law Fervid. Fervid Trimble was an energetic 87-year-old living in a seniors' residence who woke up one morning feeling dizzy. Found to be dehydrated, she was treated and admitted to the health centre for a few days of recuperation. New medications were prescribed: digoxin for her heart, antibiotics for an infection, and drugs for pain. Fervid was unhappy. She grieved for her independent life—so then came the antidepressants. She was now on nine different medications.

Janet Currie

What worried Johanna was the more drugs that were added, the worse Fervid's mental health became. She became confused and delusional, totally unlike the Fervid her family knew. Johanna's library background led her to start researching. Her research told her that drug side effects and drug interactions commonly cause older people to suffer from the medicine that is supposed to help, and that those problems were rarely discussed with doctors. Fervid's decline was likely drug-related.

Her family then insisted on a "medication review" to distinguish the helpful drugs from those causing problems, and Johanna got her wish: a staff-directed "drug holiday" which started a reduction in medications that essentially brought her mother-in-law back to life. Fervid was able to enjoy several more years of relatively healthy living surrounded by a family who loved her, instead of living in a scary drug-induced haze, getting more medication than she needed.

Since those events more than a decade ago, Johanna, who lives in Vancouver, has become a champion for the rights of patients, especially when it comes to overdrugged seniors. As a member of the BC Patient Voices Network and the Canadian Deprescribing Network, she advocates for better, more rational drug therapy for older people. The key problem that she and others have long identified is one called "polypharmacy," which is often defined as taking five prescription drugs or more at a time.

This is not a small problem. Two-thirds of Canadians over the age of 65 take at least five prescription medications per day, and one-quarter of Canadians take ten or more.

Greater Victoria has the country's fifth-highest percentage of people aged 65 and better—about 70,000 people. According to statistics, seniors have a one-in-200 likelihood of being hospitalized due to the harmful effects of their medication. This translates to 350 hospitalized seniors in Victoria per year—almost one every day. The bigger picture isn't bright either: drug safety experts estimate that adverse drug reactions (ADRs) are endemic in our drug-centric health care system, and considered to sit somewhere between the fourth and sixth leading cause of death.

According to material produced by the Canadian Deprescribing Network (deprescribingnetwork.ca), which is made up of interested health care leaders, researchers and patient advocates, older people are particularly vulnerable to the effects of too many medications. While these advocates are trying to bend the curve on overprescribing, and ensuring that there is both the confidence and mechanisms in place to help people stop medications that may be useless or harmful, the reasons older people end up on so many drugs is complex and sometimes difficult to unravel.

Victoria resident Janet Currie is currently attending UBC doing a PhD in drug safety. She is a long-time advocate for better awareness of psychiatric medications and founded a website— www.psychmedaware.org—devoted to helping people stop these medications. Also on the executive of the Deprescribing Network, she describes a typical patient this way: "This patient is on ten or more drugs and they are taking drugs that they might have been prescribed decades ago, including sleeping pills and benzodiazepines" (which are typically prescribed for anxiety and insomnia). The problem is that nobody is tracking possible drug effects which could cause dangerous falls, problems with memory, insomnia, indigestion or pain. Anytime a person is on multiple drugs, the risk of adverse drug reactions is increased. Also, seniors have reduced ability to metabolize drugs, and should be given lower drug doses than other adults.

How does one counter the inevitable accumulation of drugs in the medicine cabinets of elderly people? Currie is quick to respond: "The first thing they need to know is what drugs they are on—and this is not always easy to find out." You can request a "medication review" by a doctor or pharmacist, where they'll methodically go through a person's medications, determining what they are for and if they are still needed. Within the deprescribing community there is some debate about whether to worry most about the types of drugs being prescribed or the numbers. Clearly you have to consider both, but for Currie, mostly the numbers count. "Anyone on 10 or 12 drugs is going to have a real risk of drug interactions. The main thing is to reduce the total number of drugs."

AROUND THE COUNTRY there are people working to resolve the problems of deprescribing. There are research groups at Hamilton, Ottawa and Montreal that I am aware of that are testing ways to help doctors reduce the medication burden of seniors. There are conferences where new guidelines for deprescribing are being launched, and others developed.

Though I've long understood polypharmacy from an academic point of view (full disclosure: I worked with a group to develop www.medstopper.com as a tool to help doctors deprescribe), it wasn't until I took my own 81-year-old mother to the doctor for what is called a "complex care visit" that I truly understood the magnitude of the problem. This visit with my mom's doctor was longer than most visits, and designed for the doctor to take the time to do a complete assessment, and suggest therapies for many of the multiple challenges that many older people have. It also involves an extensive medication review.

This was a big eye-opener. I intimately knew which drugs my mother was on—a total of 7 outside a few puffers and asthma medications. Over the years I had shielded her from taking what we considered the more useless and potentially harmful drugs typically thrown at seniors. I acknowledged that anyone who has survived a few heart

> "ANYTIME A PERSON is on multiple drugs the risk of adverse drug reactions is increased. Also, seniors have reduced ability to metabolize drugs and should be given lower drug doses than other adults."—*Janet Currie*

attacks may benefit from some meds, and those "necessary" drugs were on her list.

As well, however, there was a heartburn pill (pantoprazole) which I couldn't figure out. Why was she taking that?

"Mom do you have heartburn?"

"No," she said, "Never had heartburn in my life."

"Well you're on a heartburn drug." (I know that pantoprazole is routinely prescribed in hospitals.)

"Why am I on a heartburn drug if I don't have heartburn?" she asked.

"Maybe you got it when you were in the hospital?" I said. But that was years ago. "Do you want to keep taking it?" I asked her.

"No. I tell you, I don't have heartburn," she insisted, getting a bit feisty.

So I gently suggested to my mother's doctor that the heartburn pill was probably unnecessary and she'd like to stop it. Then I got to see how even the thought of stopping a drug seemed to make the doctors nervous (there was my mother's doctor and a resident who was shadowing her).

"Are you sure?" they wondered aloud. "Maybe she was on the drug for a reason? Maybe the specialist put her on it?" they mused. Their hesitancy seemed bizarre. After all, I have studied prescribing for many years: no one puts that much thought and hesitancy into prescribing a new drug. But stopping one? Wow. You'd think the heavens would fall.

I said something like: "You know the main thing that matters to my mother is her comfort. If she's not comfortable being on a drug which no one can justify, why not just stop it? If she develops any heartburn symptoms, you can start her up again, ok?" And in the end, this was agreed to.

I always thought deprescribing would be easy. It's harder in real life. With a ton of drugs, you certainly should stop the ones that can't be explained. Then you should eliminate those that are useless, harmful, or seriously degrade the person's quality of life. At the end of the day, there is one inviolable principle: the patients' wishes trump all.

This is not easy, especially in a world where "do what you're told" medicine dominates. Challenging your medication regime takes energy, commitment, and some assertiveness. I remember what Currie said on that topic: "It is important that the family be involved—and both the senior and the family be clear on why a drug is being taken. Does it make sense to have a senior on a lot of prevention drugs like statins if they have never had a heart problem or stroke? Remember that all drugs cause side effects, so a drug should be really needed before it is taken."

After all, for many people the drugs aren't going to give them a lot more life, but they can seriously affect the life they've got left. It's never too late to start questioning and cutting back.

Alan Cassels has studied pharmaceutical policy and prescribing for 24 years. He is currently transitioning to a new position at UBC.

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Did Saanich's EDPA pose a threat to property values?

BRIONY PENN

Was a real battle fought over an invented crisis?

A new house under construction in Saanich amidst a Garry oak ecosystem

In the keynote speech at a recent conference on the value of nature in urban areas, Don Luymes, director of strategic initiatives in Surrey, cited a refrain that had many of the participants, like Saanich resident Carmel Thomson, nodding. "The battle for sustainability will be won or lost in the suburbs," said Luymes.

The suburbs of Saanich have become one of the most watched of these battlegrounds, because the stakes have never been so high: one of the hottest high-end real estate markets in the world vs. one of the most endangered ecosystems in the country. Emotions run high on both sides. Nowhere in Canada is there a place so rare and ecologically-important pitted against a global luxury housing market so aggressive.

Just as Premiers Notley and Horgan face off over a fundamental disagreement on what constitutes the national interest and constitutional rights (protecting oil investments or the coastal environment), Saanich residents engage in similar clashes over what is more important: protecting their property rights, or nature. Some, like Mayor Richard Atwell, are asserting that there is agreement that nature is valued, but disagreement on the best way to protect it on private property (or if, in fact, it can be protected on private land at all). Others are arguing that the biggest problem is leadership—a failure to listen and bring opposing groups together to work out a less polarized solution.

For people like Carmel Thomson, a local landowner who has been at the forefront of sustainability initiatives in Saanich and is one of the members of SAFE (Saanich Action for the Environment), the 33-year battle for Saanich's "rare ecosystems and vital habitat" lost a lot of ground it couldn't afford to lose on November 6, 2017. That night, Mayor Atwell, and councillors Susan Brice, Karen Harper, Fred Haynes and Lief Wergeland, voted to rescind a bylaw and planning tool called the Environmental Development Permit Area (EDPA). Their one-vote majority was the result of the September by-election to fill Vic Derman's seat (Derman died suddenly last year).

Adopted by Saanich Council in 2012, the EDPA bylaw identified environmentally sensitive areas like Garry oak ecosystems in the municipality, putting them under a special set of guidelines, and requiring a permit before you could alter them (for example the construction of a new building or dock). The areas—representing about five percent of the 40,000 private properties in Saanich (and 52 percent of public lands)—were determined by various inventories of sensitive ecosystems, wildlife trees, and conservation data. Though a permit for alteration was required, numerous exemptions were allowed, for everything from hazardous trees to existing gardens and landscaping to small outbuildings and slope stabilization. If a permit

A BC ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY REPORT of January 2016 (obtained through a freedom of information request) stated there was no evidence that an Environmental Development Permit Area designation devalued property in Saanich.

was required, certain guidelines were to be employed. While proponents saw it as inoffensive and helpful, critics claimed it was heavy-handed and an invasion of privacy.

Thomson traces Atwell's decision to rescind the EDPA back to a pledge he made publicly to represent a group of anti-EDPA landowners called SCRES (Saanich Citizens for a Responsible EDPA) who were successful in convincing the mayor, at the start of his mayoral career in April of 2015, with their claims that an EDPA designation "places an undue burden on homeowners while not protecting the environment." Atwell defends his loyalty to the anti-EDPA side: "I pledged to give a voice to the issue at the council table. This is what we do as elected representatives."

PHOTO: TONY BOUNSALL

Carmel Thomson

Mayor Richard Atwell

According to Thomson, this loyalty has led to a "failure" in public process that might have brought some clarification to these claims, and the bylaw itself. The issue has certainly attracted a more-than-average amount of controversy. The biologist who supported SCRES' claims is now facing disciplinary hearings from his professional association over possible conflict of interest.

With regard to public participation, the $50,000 independent review of Saanich's EDPA (called the Diamond Head Report) described the process as "an acrimonious social discourse" and pointed to "confusion and misunderstandings about the bylaw and its implementation." The acrimony and confusion seeped into town halls, open houses and the by-election to replace Derman, who had been pro-EDPA.

Rather than clear up the misunderstandings or implement the recommendations of the Diamond Head Report, Mayor Atwell and council passed a motion to rescind the bylaw on November 6, 2017. The toxicity of the process pushed one frustrated citizen, Dr Lynn Husted (in support of the EDPA) to file a legal petition through the Canadian *Charter for Rights and Freedoms*, just for the right to express her concerns without interruption from Atwell and some members of council.

According to Chris Tollefson, who is the executive director for the Pacific Centre for Environmental Law and Litigation and who took Husted's petition forward, his rationale for supporting this case is "to stand up for due process and the rule of law when we see things going so sideways." What he means by "sideways" can be seen on a video of that November 6 meeting, available on the Saanich Council website. What viewers will see is Husted trying to deliver her arguments for why Saanich should have waited before passing a motion to rescind the EDPA, pending results of the disciplinary hearing of the biologist. After being cut off on several occasions by the mayor and Councillor Haynes on what they perceived as a point of order, Husted was ordered to stop.

Atwell apologized in a settlement out of court, but is not initiating any changes in the chilly climate of debate around EDPAs. According to Atwell, "The rules that currently exist have been in place since we began webcasting council meetings and remain in place unchanged."

When asked why he didn't implement the recommendations of the Diamond Head Report (which was commissioned by Saanich) instead of rescinding the bylaw, Atwell stated: "The overwhelming response is that the EDPA is not working as intended, is burdensome and achieving little in the way of measurable results."

Thomson argues that Atwell's position is inconsistent with the findings of the report which "confirmed the high level of interest, knowledge and passion Saanich residents have towards environmental protection in their municipality…there is support in the community for protecting the natural environment using the EDPA, but that improvement in the Bylaw is required."

The 77-page Diamond Head Report provides ample evidence that the EDPA is supported by the public, along with 15 recommendations on how to improve it. The consultation was extensive, and included a review of all public feedback from open houses, town halls, questionnaires, and interviews with landowners, staff members and council—as well as a review of economic impacts of the bylaw, and best practices in other local governments. Atwell's reference to "measureable results" seems unclear, as the only measureable data available is what staff collected for 2016 on 20 permits for restoration. Those permits resulted in the successful planting of native trees and shrubs in all 20 cases, and removal of invasive species in half of them.

AT THE HEART OF THE ISSUE is whether the battle for sustainability is losing ground because of the limited tools available, or the deteriorating state of public discourse—with real estate prices skewing the debate further. EDPAs are one of the few legal tools that a municipality has to influence how natural areas on private land are protected. It is the same kind of tool that has worked reasonably well for stream and tree protection, flood control, and hazardous slopes where the development permit designation provides restrictions, but also some flexibility to negotiate development design through the permit process. The tool has been available under the *Local Government Act* and *Municipal Act* since 1985, but it took Saanich Council 27 years—after a lot of lobbying from citizen groups and people like Thomson—to add ecologically-sensitive areas like Garry oak ecosystems to more conventional stream and slope protection measures.

The Province kick-started the process in the early 1990s in the Capital region by leading the Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory Mapping project—a necessary first step to establishing this bylaw, and following on BC's international commitment to biodiversity. The municipal role of protecting ecological values has only slowly been embraced, because the development industry has influenced, perhaps unduly,

local government agendas. Understandably, those who had fought for this hard-won planning tool are not happy with the reversal, especially in light of the fact that the independent consultants found the majority of the public was in support of it.

Part of the problem, Thomson suggests, is the misinformation that was generated by "well-lawyered landowners." Much of the recruiting for SCRES appears to have emanated from Ten Mile Point. Eight properties that applied for removal from EDPA and were identified in the disciplinary hearing for the biologist's "failure to undertake proper due diligence and ground work with respect to the preparation of reports" all came from two streets: Tudor and Seaview.

Residents on both sides of the issue declined to comment, due to the toxic nature of the conflict. When trying to find a spokesperson for SCRES, *Focus* was directed to the biologist named in the hearings. On the SCRES website, a key resource listed is the Fraser Institute's *Stealth Confiscation: How Governments Regulate, Freeze and Devalue Private Property without Compensation*, which claims that property values are lowered by these types of designations. SCRES' campaign was launched in 2015 on that assumption. Leaflets were distributed stating "it punishes thousands of homeowners without compensation" and "Not only does it impact true property development or subdivision but it also impacts the enjoyment, use AND the resale value of thousands of private properties whose owners just want to plant gardens, add patios and build fences."

Yet a BC Assessment Authority report of January 2016 (obtained through a freedom of information request) stated there was no evidence that an EDPA designation devalued property in Saanich. Was this report ignored by those opposed to the EDPA?

A January 2017 report conducted by Rollo and Associates concluded that in only a few extreme cases would the EDPA guidelines impact property values. These impacts could be eliminated by Saanich relaxing the EDPA guidelines for these very few properties. The authors noted that there was "quite a bit of confusion, uncertainty and misunderstanding regarding the impact of EDPA guidelines on land use and property development." Again, we have to wonder whether this report, too, was ignored by EDPA opponents.

Thomson doesn't buy the idea that this is an unworkable bylaw. The Diamond Head Report points out that "similar EDPAs are implemented in many other BC municipalities without incident." This includes North Vancouver, West Vancouver, Kelowna, Nanaimo, Campbell River and Surrey. Though "broadly comparable…none had the degree of protest seen in Saanich." The consultants reviewed the use of EDPAs in nine other local governments and identified key elements that Saanich might want to adopt and improve on. Some of those strategies (outside of the EDPA), Saanich council is already endorsing.

When mayor and council passed a motion to explore rescinding the bylaw on October 28, they also requested their staff "report as soon as possible on the potential of developing a Saanich program which includes the topics of Climate Adaptation, a Biodiversity Conservation Strategy, and Stewardship Program to serve as a policy framework for other Saanich environmental policies and programs and a new Environmental Development Permit Area be considered part of this program; and the Diamond Head Report recommendations be considered as a component of this report."

But by November 6, a resolution was moved by Karen Harper to rescind the EDPA. Dozens of citizens spoke forcefully on the matter—on both sides—and councillors opposed (Brownoff, Murdock, Plant and Sanders) made the point that it was imprudent to ignore the consultants' recommendations, throw aside a bylaw that had been years in the making, and act contrary to the goal of a sustainable Saanich.

Throwing the baby out with the bathwater doesn't make a lot of sense to Lynn Husted either. "How can a close vote be able to overturn a bylaw that various reports found to be at least as good or better than others studied, that has been in place for six-plus years, and where most of the recommendations for improvements could be implemented within a year."

Atwell, on the other hand, seems attached to his voluntary approach to stewardship: "The municipality cannot police private property in any practical way. To accomplish that, it needs an incentive-based approach towards stewardship that gains social license and can be easily understood by residents. The EDPA took the opposite approach, and failed for that reason."

Stewardship programs have been underway in Saanich for years, with an Environmental Education Officer who administers programs like Naturescape; *Our Backyard* quarterly newsletter; the Garry Oak Restoration Project that showcases best practices; workshops; control of invasive species; and a native plant salvage program.

Saanich has been leading the pack provincially in this regard, but voluntary measures have not halted the downward decline of this vital ecosystem. The Sensitive Ecosystem Mapping Inventory was completed over 20 years ago, and at that time, less than five percent of Garry oak ecosystems still existed, with over a third of these remnants in Saanich (of which roughly half were on private land, and half in Saanich's parks). One thing almost all municipal planners will agree on is that tracking the success of policy is essential, and that voluntary measures only go so far before laws need to kick in at a critical level—and Garry oak ecosystems are at a critical level.

Thomson and Husted are hoping that there will be some changes in the process: more education, more use of data about the current state of the environment, and building on the information and ideas generated through earlier consultation (i.e. research and reports like Diamond Head). "We could be engaging the wider community in identifying issues, generating ideas and, together, developing workable solutions that could include notions such as tax incentives for those who have natural areas." In the Gulf Islands, for instance, the Natural Area Protection Tax Exemption Program (NAPTEP) provides a tax rebate of 65 percent of a landowner's annual property tax on the portion of their land protected by a NAPTEP convenant. There are lessons to be learned from the wider community.

According to Thomson, "the battle for sustainability can be won if Saanich shows true leadership, and lives up to its Official Community Plan's commitment to being 'a sustainable community where a healthy natural environment is recognized as paramount for ensuring social well-being and economic vibrancy for current and future generations.' Preservation of our fragile ecosystems depends on it—and our children and grandchildren are depending on us."

Briony Penn's most recent book, *The Real Thing: The Natural History of Ian McTaggart Cowan*, won the Roderick Haig-Brown Regional Prize and the inaugural Mack Laing Literary Prize. She now lives on Salt Spring Island, but she grew up in Saanich and worked on mapping Garry oak ecosystems in the Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory over two decades ago.

ADVERTISEMENT

Paddle off the beaten path

With youthful energy and a love of wilderness, Ralph and Lannie Keller moved to the outer Discovery Islands and began to live their dream. At an old homestead near the top of a sheltered bay, they built a house and a lodge, and created one of Canada's first kayak touring companies.

Fast forward 40 years, and the family-operated company has introduced more than four thousand adventure seekers to the sport of multi-day kayaking. Despite opportunities for growth, the Kellers have kept their operation small and laid back. "We enjoy being independent, and providing homestead hospitality is important to us," says Lannie. "It means we're on the dock when folks arrive and waving goodbye at the end of the trip—and it's likely we'll be paddling together!" At Coast Mountain every guest is a real person and many become friends when they return for other trips to different places.

Guest comfort and safety is also high on the Keller's list of priorities. Each trip begins with kayak instruction that provides new skills for both beginner and experienced paddlers. While on a trip, guests enjoy top quality kayaks and equipment, spacious tents, and soft sleeping mats. "We always outfit our guests with the same excellent gear that we use for ourselves," says Ralph.

The small-is-beautiful approach of Coast Mountain Expeditions is also reflected in the food that's served to guests. Lannie's large garden provides loads of fresh fruit and vegetables, and the kitchen specializes in real slow-food and deliciously wholesome baked goods. The vegetarian menu is augmented with locally harvested sea foods, including wild salmon caught by local fishers and shellfish from local beaches.

With all that they offer, the Kellers recognize that it's nature that really provides the Coast Mountain experience. They've learned that a wilderness kayak journey is as nourishing for mind as it is for body, a sentiment echoed by son Albert, an experienced kayak guide who, along with wife Kate, has a new lead role in the family business. He sees first-hand how being in nature provides opportunities for people to de-stress and recharge, and observes, "Being out there is a humbling experience that reconnects us with what's really important. And sharing time with no one staring into a smart phone—seriously, how often does that happen these days?"

An expedition explores Bute Inlet

The large garden provides fruit and vegetables

Connection with nature is a theme that runs deep in the Kellers' lifestyle and the philosophy of Coast Mountain Expeditions. Entirely off-grid, the family homestead is a comfortable blend of ingenuity and low-impact technologies. The timber frame lodge is hand built from salvaged beach logs, electricity is from small hydro and solar power systems, and the wood-fired hot tub and creek-side sauna are delightfully rustic comforts.

Appreciation for their natural surroundings has made advocating for the environment a high priority for the Kellers. "We're fortunate to live and work in this amazing place," says Ralph. "Protecting the beauty and biodiversity is important for everyone's healthy future."

Sharing that sentiment and great natural adventures is the business of Coast Mountain Expeditions. With an enthusiastic crew of friendly professional guides, this little company offers a variety of kayak tours exploring the best places of the Discovery Islands, Desolation Sound, and mainland fjords. Coast Mountain's 2018 kayak tours range from easy to challenging with a trip for everyone's abilities.

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The Kellers at Coast Mountain Expeditions on Read Island: Ralph, Lannie, Albert and Kate

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Should farmland be reserved for food growing?

JUDITH LAVOIE

Marijuana greenhouses, wineries and monster houses are eroding BC's already limited capacity to feed itself.

As Nathalie Chambers describes the onslaught of non-farming uses chewing away at BC's agricultural land, from cannabis production to industrial parking lots, she points to her particular bugbear—huge houses, surrounded by acres of formerly productive farmland.

"They are like smallpox. Carbuncles on farmland. We need requirements on house sizes right away," she said, singling out one home, now surrounded by fill, built on previously fertile Blenkinsop Valley farmland.

Soaring costs of farmland—sparked by interest from wealthy mansion-builders or consortiums hoping to cash in on the legalization of recreational marijuana coming in August—means genuine farmers are being priced out of the market, say groups that are asking the Province to step in to protect the Agricultural Land Reserve which encompasses about five percent of the land in BC.

"We are the most food insecure province in Canada and we are denying farmers access to the land," said Chambers, operator of Madrona Farm and co-chair of the Farmland Protection Coalition.

Lower Mainland areas, such as Richmond, are scrambling to control monster homes of more than 10,000 square feet, built on ALR land, but the problem on Southern Vancouver Island is often big houses, built on two-hectare (five-acre) lots, which are then lost to food production. Sometimes, by growing a token amount, owners take advantage of lower property taxes on farmland.

Martin Collins, Agricultural Land Commission director of policy and planning, said people who want to build mansions gravitate towards the ALR. "Scale matters, but, now, proliferation is more of a problem—the numbers of them. Our regulation has been too permissive, I think," he said.

Also, Collins pointed out, it is local councils which decide whether a second dwelling for farm help can be built on ALR properties. "Local governments have had a very elastic perspective about that and if the landowner says they need a building for farm help, they give it to them even when they are doing a minimal amount of farming on the property," he said.

Agriculture Minister Lana Popham said she has been hearing about ALR problems since taking over the portfolio, which is why she has appointed an advisory committee that will travel the province looking for ideas on how to better protect the ALR.

The committee, which will look at pressures for non-agricultural use, ALR resilience, and the two-zone system brought in by the former Liberal government, will make interim recommendations to Popham this spring.

"Creating the ALR was an amazing decision made in the 1970s to protect BC's farmland, but we couldn't have foreseen some of the current pressures, like mega mansions and cannabis production as examples, that would shape and influence the land in the ALR today," Popham said in an emailed response to questions from *Focus*. "We have been clear in our belief that land in the ALR should be used for farming and we are committed to food security for our province."

THE FORCES LINED UP AGAINST SUCH GOALS are impressive, and complications abound. Farmers, for instance, are finding it difficult to turn down purchase offers financially far beyond what they would have once expected to receive for agricultural land.

By last September, Delta alone had received 35 applications from companies looking to grow marijuana in the ALR, and other municipalities are also reporting interest from companies wanting to convert greenhouses from tomatoes and cucumbers to marijuana.

> “WE HAVE GOT TO GET REAL. We can no longer allow a bunch of capitalist cowboys to run roughshod over the natural resources and the ecosystems that all our lives, livelihoods and—literally—happiness rely upon.”
>
> *—Kent Mullinix, director of the Institute for Sustainable Food Systems at Kwantlen Polytechnic University*

In Central Saanich, Evergreen Medicinal Supply is hoping to build marijuana greenhouses on the 40-acre Stanhope Dairy Farm, while in Saanich a former horse boarding facility on Oldfield Road has been bought by a company which is converting the barn and has applied for a building permit for greenhouses.

Kent Mullinix

When it was announced recently that the high-profile Woodwynn Farm on West Saanich Road was going on the market, there were rumoured inquiries from people interested in cannabis cultivation.

“Any piece of land in the district now is fair game,” said Central Saanich Mayor Ryan Windsor, whose council is asking the provincial government for a six-month moratorium on the use of agricultural land for the production of cannabis, to allow for consultations with municipalities, farmers and the industry.

Currently, municipal hands are tied by a 2015 decision by the former Liberal government that licensed marijuana grow operations should be allowed on ALR land and that municipalities should not be allowed to pass bylaws prohibiting cannabis farms.

“The decision rests entirely with the Province and we would like them to go back and look at it,” said Windsor, who believes there was inadequate consultation before the rule was brought in. “If someone puts in a building permit application and it meets all the requirements for greenhouses, we pretty well have to issue it,” Windsor said.

Communities such as Central Saanich, with large swathes of ALR land, are particularly attractive to cannabis growers. Following federal rule changes earlier this year, the crop no longer has to be grown in a bunker with plants stored in a high-security vault. Instead, marijuana can now be grown in greenhouses, provided there is heavy security.

Many believe industrial, not agricultural land, should be used for marijuana cultivation, and, on the Saanich Peninsula, the newly-formed Citizens Protecting Agricultural Land (CPAL) has collected more than 1000 signatures on a petition asking the Province to reverse the 2015 legislation allowing ALR land to be used for grow-ops. “Marijuana grow-ops should not be permitted on land in the ALR because they destroy the agricultural value of the land and its potential to produce food,” says the petition.

CPAL spokesman Ken Marriette said the group wants to tackle the gold-rush attitude and stop factory-like marijuana production facilities, with concrete-floored greenhouses, from destroying farmland. “It’s just awful. Put it on non-farmland,” Marriette said. “We don’t want the next generations of British Columbians to have to rely on other countries for our food crops.”

JoAnne Nelson, one of the petition organizers, said the concept is alarming. “People have finally found a way to monetize agricultural land and it’s going to blow away the other uses. You are talking consortiums of investors…It’s a movement that is threatening the entire rural community,” she said.

ON THE LOWER MAINLAND, ANOTHER THREAT comes in the shape of wineries, with a token vineyard and buildings catering to weddings and meetings, a trend ALR director Collins describes as Disneyfication. “There’s a huge demand for these spaces, so you get it flowing into the ALR and turning these beautiful fields into parking lots,” he said.

The winery situation is not so critical on Vancouver Island, where producers can grow wine-producing grapes, but regulations tying production and retailing need to be tightened, Collins said. The regulations are too permissive and have been eroded over the decades, he said. “This isn’t real agriculture. It’s capital finding a place to land. We need to find a way to prevent this loose money from landing in the ALR,” said Collins, who is cautiously optimistic the NDP government will make changes. “Maybe they will be as innovative as they were in 1972, but, like all politicians, they will smell the wind,” he said.

Kent Mullinix, director of the Institute for Sustainable Food Systems at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, said government must acknowledge that agricultural land is a precious, non-renewable resource that all mankind relies upon. Climate change means arable land is already being lost at an extraordinary rate, but agriculture has been economically marginalized and farmers can’t compete with interests such as development and marijuana, Mullinix said. That means the Province needs to decommodify agricultural land through policy and regulation, he said.

“A good place to start is to review the tax structure that gives breaks to people who own ALR land and really don’t farm it. The speculative value, the value from developing agricultural land and taking it out of agriculture, needs to be taxed away,” he said, suggesting an agricultural land bank could also be considered.

Mullinix, whose department is about to release a white paper on revitalizing the ALR, believes ALR land should be used only for food production, and he would like to see government restrict farmland ownership to trained farmers—likely resulting in the price of farmland plummeting.

“That would mean big money would go somewhere else,” he said. “We have got to get real. We can no longer allow a bunch of capitalist cowboys to run roughshod over the natural resources and the ecosystems that all our lives, livelihoods and—literally—happiness rely upon,” he said.

People need to understand that the importance of the issue transcends food and agriculture, Mullinix said. “This is really about how we are going to move through the rest of the 21st century with all the sustainability challenges the next generation will face and generations after that. We will either set things up now so they will stand a chance or we won’t.”

The BC government has posted a discussion paper and an online survey at https://engage.gov.bc.ca/agriculturallandreserve.

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

Are the City of Victoria's marijuana regulations working?

PAMELA ROTH

And what will happen next summer when recreational cannabis becomes legal in Canada?

The 1400 block of Douglas Street where Chris Zmuda says his deli was squeezed out of business by the smell from nearby pot shops

For three years, Chris Zmuda soaked in the sweet smell of success wafting from his Downtown deli, the Taste of Europe, on Douglas Street. With the help of three employees, Zmuda happily served lunches made from the Polish recipes he acquired from his home country, and built a loyal group of customers eager to feast on kapuska soup and homemade pierogies.

But in March of last year, his deli turned into a cannabis sandwich thanks to the arrival of two marijuana dispensaries on either side of his business. They were 20 metres apart, even though City of Victoria regulations call for a distance of at least 400 metres between dispensaries. Only one of them has a license to operate legally.

It didn't take long before Zmuda noticed a dramatic change in business. "The customers didn't like it. People stopped coming because they smelled marijuana inside the store. My business went into the toilet," said Zmuda, who approached the City numerous times about the bylaw infraction pertaining to the distance between the dispensaries.

The City has taken the unlicensed dispensary to court, but a decision has yet to be made on its future. In the meantime, Zmuda decided to move his business to a location on Yates Street. It's a move he feels he shouldn't have had to make. "I spent my life savings to invest in providing Victorians a unique kind of food and I worked hard to establish my business," he said. "Now I am broke because of this situation."

ZMUDA IS NOT ALONE AMONG DOWNTOWN BUSINESSES and residents when it comes to being impacted by the area's numerous medical marijuana dispensaries.

In order to get a handle on the number of medicinal dispensaries sprouting up in Victoria, the City developed and put cannabis regulations in place in November 2016, making it the first municipality on Vancouver Island to do so.

Under the regulations, businesses selling cannabis are required to go through a rezoning process, then apply for a $5000 business licence to operate legally. They also can't be within 200 metres of a school, must be 400 metres from other permitted marijuana storefronts, and follow a number of other rules, such as no consumption on site. These rules or policies, with the exception of proximity to a school, can and have been waived by City council.

Following a 60-day grace period that allowed dispensaries time to adjust to the new regulations, the City announced it would take legal action against those who failed to comply. A year later, at least 32 marijuana dispensaries are now operating in the City of Victoria. Only seven of those have been approved for business licenses and another five are in the process of getting one.

According to the City, 39 rezoning applications have been submitted, but some of those are for new operations. So far council has approved 11 of those applications and 11 have been declined. Ten dispensaries have shut down, but some continue to ignore the rules, causing bylaw officers to hand out more than $135,000 in fines.

The City is currently taking court action against three dispensaries and recently won its first injunction when the BC Supreme Court sided with council's decision to deny a rezoning application to the Green Dragon Medicinal Society, which is located 155 metres from the Chinese Public School.

Mayor Lisa Helps called the decision significant, noting it was the first time the City's marijuana regulations were tested before the court. "Unless we have the legal authority of the court with an injunction, we feel we don't have the grounds to shut them down," said Helps. The City, she noted, is also looking at taking legal action against landlords who continue to lease space to dispensaries that won't follow the rules.

Helps admits the process isn't perfect, but she feels the City has the right framework and so far it seems to be working. In some cases, she said council can consider variances to the separation distance of 400 metres if the dispensaries are small in size.

The City's main focus is on medicinal dispensaries that have come

AT LEAST 32 MARIJUANA DISPENSARIES are now operating in the City of Victoria. Only seven of those have been approved for business licenses and another five are in the process of getting one.

to council, been turned down, but continue to operate. Once the federal government officially makes recreational marijuana legal—expected in August—and the Province's regulations around that legalization come into effect, Helps expects things will change dramatically.

THOUGH A LOT OF QUESTIONS REMAIN around the coming legalization, we do know that in BC, recreational marijuana will be sold from both private and government-operated stand-alone retail stores where customers will need to be at least 19.

The BC Liquor Distribution Branch (LDB) will be the sole, wholesale distributor of non-medical cannabis for the Province while the Liquor Control and Licensing Branch will be given the responsibility to license and oversee private stores. An early registration process for those interested in applying for a cannabis retail licence will be launched this spring.

Helps is confident that when the Province becomes the wholesaler and a provincial licence is needed to operate, that will make the shops that continue to ignore the City shut down right away.

"The Province has way more of a hammer than we do," she said. "I can't wait until the rules come into effect. It would be like a liquor store being open without a provincial licence and selling liquor that people have made in their basement. It's unthinkable."

But it may not be as simple or as clearly a provincial matter as Helps suggests.

The Province won't cap the number of retail licences available and a license won't be issued without the support of local governments, which have the authority to make decisions based on the needs of their communities, so city councils will still be involved.

Moreover, the status of the current "medicinal" retailers is still a bit murky. The federal government has said it will be reviewing the medicinal cannabis system within five years. A Health Canada spokesperson recently told CTV News it will be up to the provinces to decide whether to licence medical cannabis dispensaries separately from recreational stores. A BC government spokesperson told *Focus* that at this time, all dispensaries are being treated the same.

Alex Robb, director and general manager of Trees Dispensary, which became the first cannabis retailer to be rezoned under the City of Victoria's new rules, said there's a grey area that hasn't been covered by either the federal or provincial government's legalization plan.

Trees began as a medical cannabis storefront, but has decided to proceed with the provincial licencing framework over fears it could be shut down. "There's a lot to lose if we were to try and go against the system even though we disagree with some of what's included in the planned legalization. In some ways we are more vulnerable than when we started," said Robb, who believes, like Helps, that the Province will have additional enforcement tools.

"It's a difficult and stressful time to continue to be activists working to provide access for people [with medical needs] when there's a framework being created that we can retail cannabis to the population at large."

Some of the city's medicinal pot shops have a large and loyal network of supporters, like the Victoria Cannabis Buyers Club, which has been operating at its current location at 818-826 Johnson Street for almost 17 years. The organization, unlike most of the cannabis shops, has a consumption lounge on site; it had been granted an exemption to an on-site consumption ban in 2016.

In January it went through a public hearing for a rezoning application at which numerous supporters turned up. Even though there are two approved dispensaries already operating within 400 metres, it was approved by City council. Most councillors cited the Cannabis Buyers Club's longevity and that it had gone unnoticed for many years to justify their support for it, despite the proximity to other cannabis shops.

The outcome, however, wasn't without its detractors. One woman, who lives in a new condo building near the Cannabis Buyers Club and rents space for an art studio next to it, told council, "I don't want to debate the ethics of cannabis, however, I think this location is different because the smell is atrocious outside and inside the building. It makes it very difficult for me to take people in [the studio]."

VICTORIA POLICE, ALTHOUGH THEY MONITOR the pot shops, won't get involved unless they believe they are contributing to violent crime or seriously disrupting the surrounding community.

Police Chief Del Manak said the current medicinal dispensaries become a priority only when officers receive information that organized crime is involved, if they're dealing to youth, if they're disruptive to the public peace, or if it's advertised that clients don't need a medical reason to purchase the drug.

"The operation of a storefront cannabis retail business is contrary to federal law and is therefore subject to investigation and prosecution at any time," said Manak. "However, given the unusual circumstances surrounding access to cannabis, including various court decisions regarding access to 'medical' cannabis and the federal government's stated commitment to the legalization of non-medical cannabis, the Victoria Police Department has determined that at a strategic level, our approach to enforcement of cannabis storefront operations will take a variety of factors into account."

In January 2017, police raided Remedy Medicinals on Fisgard Street after 30 pounds of marijuana was discovered on a Helijet flight a few weeks earlier. The 23-year-old owner of the dispensary was later charged with possession of a controlled substance for the purpose of trafficking. Police cited the transport via commercial aircraft as a concern that potentially put the public, passengers, and crew at risk.

Chris Zmuda could be forgiven for pointing out that many of the current shops contain enough cannabis to put neighbouring businesses at risk. With his Taste of Europe now on Yates Street, he doesn't have any cannabis shops in his building—or even the same block. Yet. But who knows what will happen after the coming legalization of recreational cannabis.

A journalist since 2003, Pamela has spent the bulk of her career covering court and crime for various newspapers in western Canada, including the Regina Leader-Post and the Edmonton Sun. An avid traveller, Pamela also specializes in travel writing and recently published a true crime book called *Deadmonton*.

Form as meaning(s)

AAREN MADDEN

Four First Nations curators bring new perspectives to the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria's Pacific Northwest prints collection.

The curators (l-r): Marcia Crosby (and grandson), Nicole Stanbridge (AGGV), Michelle Jacques (AGGV), Lou-ann Neel, lessLIE (and daughter), and Alana Sayers.

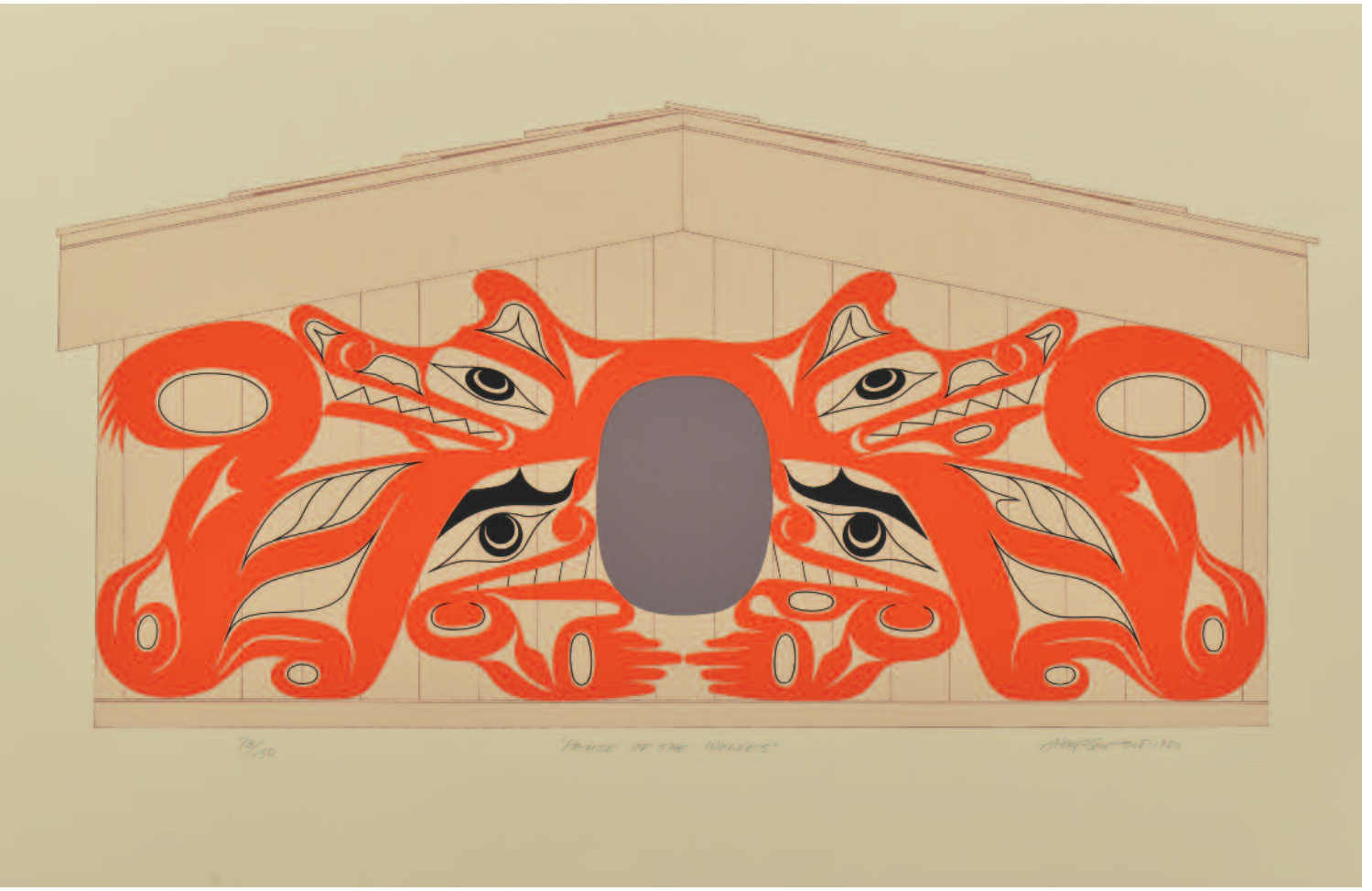
Back in the 1980s, Lou-ann Neel was a teenager working at Arts of the Raven Gallery and Open Pacific Graphics (later Pacific Editions Ltd.), important places in the flourishing First Nations art scene. She vividly remembers the days when artists would come in to sign their prints, created in editions of 100. "The excitement probably wore off after the first 25 or so were signed," she allows with humour, but she cherished the opportunity to talk with the artists about their work and their ideas. "Those moments stayed with me and continue to inspire me to do my best as an artist, and to always remember the histories of our people, which is where the inspiration for our work comes from."

A print that stood out for her then—and now—is "Salmon" by Henry Hunt (1923-1985). Created in 1972, she saw it every day at Arts of the Raven. "To me," she shares, "it represented an important benchmark in time on several levels: first, the salmon is probably one of the most important food sources amongst coastal people, so this representation of a salmon speaks to how much we value salmon—enough to immortalize it in print form. Second, the colours used are such classic 'old-style' Southern Kwagiulth colours, which I've always appreciated and continue to use in my own works today," says the accomplished Kwakwaka'wakw artist.

"Salmon" is the first work in Neel's section of the exhibition *Form as Meaning: First Nations Prints from the Pacific Northwest*. Along with Marcia Crosby, lessLIE and Alana Sayers, Neel has selected works from the permanent collection of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria that generate meaning on a number of levels. The curators show how the prints provide cultural context while showing the vitality, variety, influence and innovation amongst artists working with traditional forms.

A common thread is a challenge to any notion of statis, literally or figuratively. "Salmon" incorporates traditional ovoids and u-forms, in, as Neel notes, traditional black, brick-red and deep green. However, its vigorous rendering frees it from the buff-coloured page.

Neel's selections proceed from "Salmon" chronologically, in order



"House of the Wolves" by Art Thompson

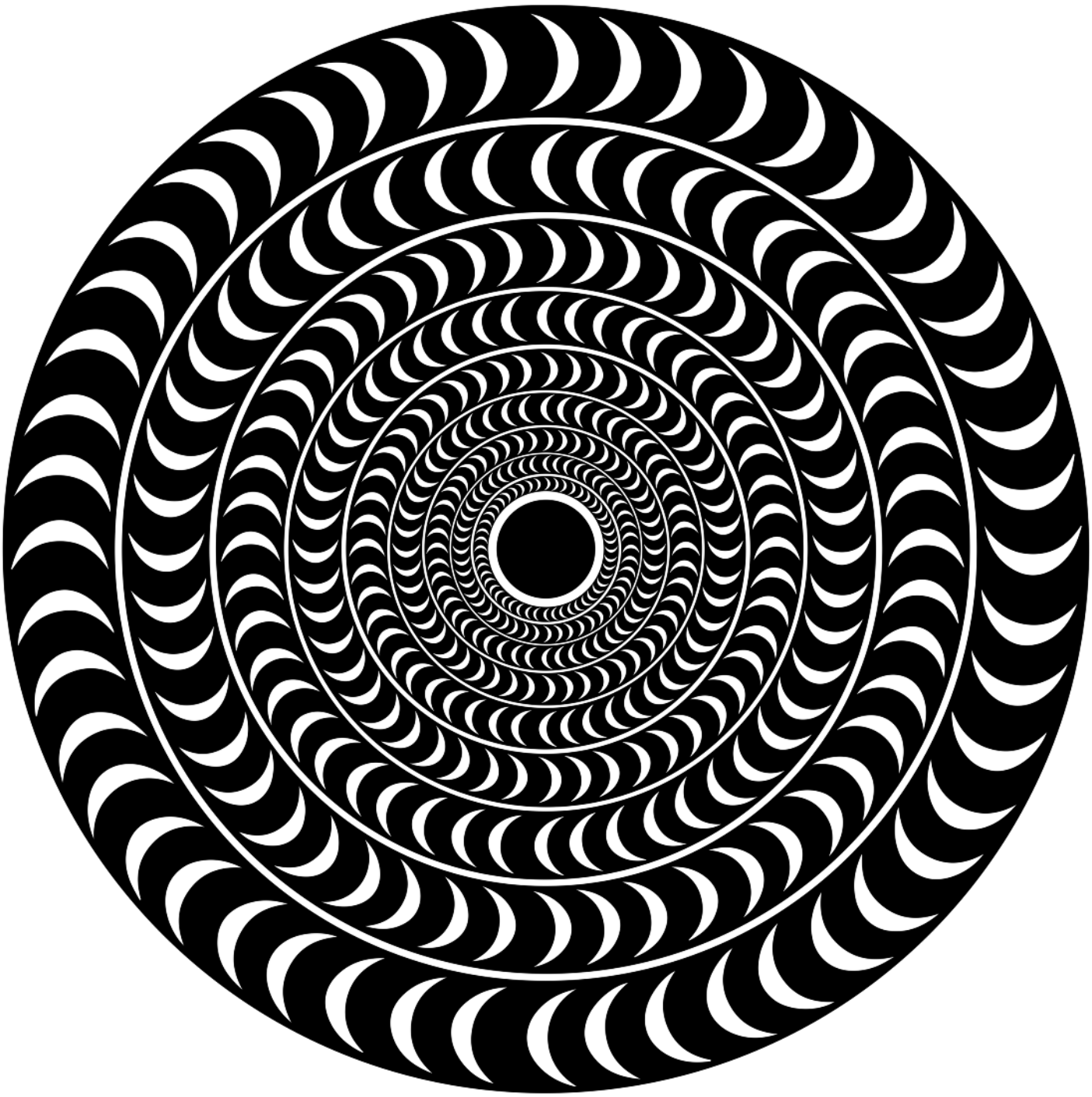
to show how early works laid a path for younger artists to follow and further innovate from. Mark Henderson's work, for example, she included due to its use of the entire picture plane to create a larger landscape. "It is something that was very groundbreaking in Northwest Coast design at the time," she explains, as was his expansion of the traditional palette. Worlds of possibility were opened up for other artists to either explore traditional idioms or incorporate wide-ranging influences: Neel points out how Roy Henry Vickers' "Goolka" fills the surface with narrative while invoking Hokusai's print, "The Great Wave off Kanagawa."

Neel's selections conclude with works by Susan Point and lessLIE, artists that employ the trigons, circles and crescent shapes indicative of their Coast Salish culture. Hanging side by side, they show the former influenced the latter. However, as the exhibition segues into lessLIE's selections as a co-curator, his work—and his curatorial approach—offers a compelling conceptual element. lessLIE is a Coast Salish artist working in two dimensional forms—prints and original paintings. He holds a Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies from the University of Victoria. While he focuses on Coast Salish works that he feels he can speak to culturally and those from other nations that influenced his practice, he offers the concept of motif as language. "They [design motifs] are actual cultural beliefs to live by," his curatorial statement reads.

Left: "Full Circle" by Susan Point

lessLIE's intention is to continually show that, in image and in language, there is always more than meets the eye. "Spinning Whorl(d)," a collaboration with Nlaka'pamux artist Oliva Mailhot, is an example. The title itself is a play on language and its possibilities, suggesting meanings rife within if we care to find them in word or mark. Referencing the spindle whorl as an important item of Coast Salish culture and a point of departure for many print designs, they create the unlikely phenomenon of a kinetic, interactive work of two-dimensional art. In fact, even the artist finds unexpected layers: "I was intending it to be a Coast Salish Op Art print evoking a spinning spindle whorl. Yet when I received the print from Eric Bourquin of Seacoast Screen Printing, I was surprised to see that not only does it evoke spinning, but also depth and dimension, the convex form of spindle whorls, the tides of the Salish Sea, and a mediation between two-dimensional Salish graphic art, and carved art," says lessLIE.

Alana Sayers continues the conflation of language and visual art by including her own poetry among her selections. "Like the art, [the poems] have layers of tradition, culture, knowledge, and story," she says. "I was stitched together in a kaleidoscope of shape and colour," read her words, floating on the wall overhead, as Art Thompson's "House of the Wolves" begins a startling parade of Nuu-Chah-Nulth artists' works. Being from that First Nation, says Sayers, "it was important that all of my prints were from Nuu-Chah-Nulth [artists] so that I could best talk about what 'form as meaning' means to me in a Nuu-Chah-Nulth context."



ARTIST STATEMENT: With the concentric circles of your eyes, focus on the black circle in the center of this design. After a minute or two, notice how a spinning feeling is evoked through the concentric crescent rings of the design. Looking at another point in the room after this can also alter your perception of reality. This is one of the intentions of this work, to alter perceptions of reality and notions of Coast Salish art. With this work, I wanted to evoke the spinning feeling of spindle whorls through a graphic medium. I wanted the image to have life, and be interactive. I wanted the work to holistically be perceived beyond the aesthetic confines of the paper, ink, and frame. I was inspired to create this design as a result of the exhibition Out of the Frame, curated by Dr. Andrea Walsh. The Op Art influence should be obvious. I wanted a contemporary Coast Salish graphic work with cross cultural influences, which would challenge people's notions of Indigenous art forms as static. This work was a collaboration with Nlaka'pamux artist Ovila Mailhot, who digitally rendered my design concept with Adobe Illustrator. —*lessLIE*

Left: "Spinning Whorl(d)" by lessLIE

Sayers is a PhD student in English Literature at UVic, and that department's first Indigenous support officer and teaching assistant in Indigenous literature. Part of her approach is to challenge assumptions about art and academia, and about what Pacific Northwest First Nations art "is and isn't." To do so, she hung work from her own collection by her uncle Rodney Sayers among works by Art Thompson and Joe David. "Tiichin, Ride the Lightning" and "Hupacasath" show a playful, contemporary pop sensibility, while their proximity to the other artists' works connect them to larger traditions.

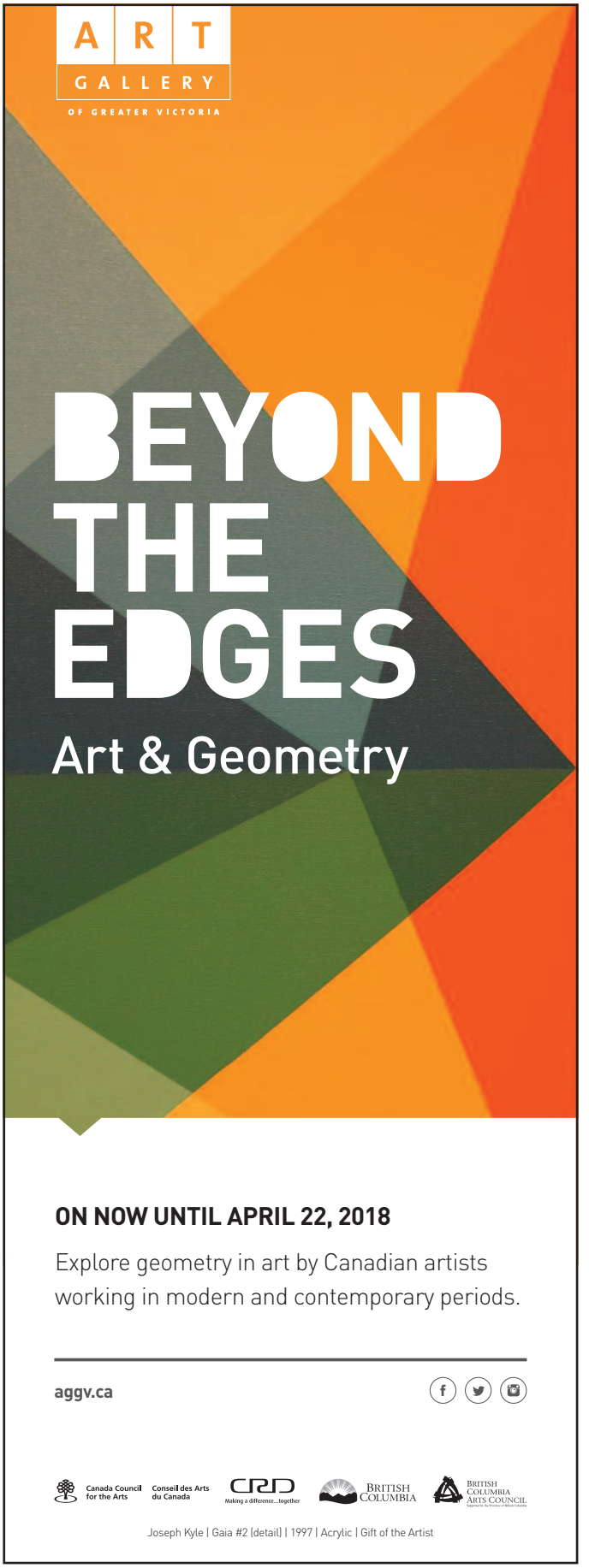
Marcia Crosby, a Tsimshian-Haida writer, art historian and educator, uses connection in another way for her approach. She considers cross-cultural influence and exchange among First Nations historically and currently, including the importance of individual artists, groups, institutions, and the school at 'Ksan, where prominent First Nations artists like Robert Davidson and Doug Cranmer taught and influenced several others. The works she has chosen highlight variety and innovation in technique and approach by a range of different First Nations. Form relates to meaning in broad terms of artistic development that links "deeper histories" to "possible futures."

The idea of "possible futures" for Pacific Northwest Coast prints is an easy and exciting one to take away from this exhibition because of the unique perspectives of each curator. The curatorial staff at the AGGV came up with the theme, then invited the guest curators to gather for a working session to share thoughts on the collection and specific works within. After that, each worked independently, exploring the importance of cultural connection, the potentials of language and juxtaposition, and the insights revealed through chronology and personal experience. Form creates meaning in all of these contexts.

It's a valuable opportunity for visitors to see a collection through this particular set of eyes. As lessLIE articulates, "it was gracious and vital of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria to hire indigenous artists to co-curate this exhibition. First Nations people need to represent First Nations art. Each co-curator added a unique approach to selecting works based on differing backgrounds." Visitors take away a more profound contextualization of Henry Hunt's "Salmon" and all that followed. Possibilities for the art form, its evolution, and exhibition are exciting to contemplate. "I believe this [exhibition] will add to a growing discussion around Aboriginal curatorial practice," Neel concludes.

Form as Meaning: First Nations Prints from the Pacific Northwest continues until June 17 at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. 1040 Moss St, 250-384-4171. Check aggv.ca for drop-in tours and other related events.

Much like Lou-ann Neel, Aaren Madden also cherished the special days when she worked at Alcheringa Gallery, when artists would come in with a brand-new print to show and discuss.



M E CARR.

WordsThaw • March 16–18

WHILE WE DON'T GET MUCH OF A WINTER to speak of down here at sea level, up on the "Hat," it's a different story, with far more snow and ice. Perhaps that's why UVic's *Malahat Review* calls its annual springtime writers festival "WordsThaw." This year, the theme is all things Victoria, and the writers are local, local, local. Micaela Maftei, interim editor, says the festival this year is drawing inspiration from the publication's 200th issue, "which celebrated Victoria's history; the present healthy, vibrant writing scene; and what might come next."

Carla Funk

Maftei explains that the symposium's kickoff "Words on Ice" gathering on Friday night will feature readings from poets, creative non-fiction, and fiction writers, including Julie Paul (emcee), John Barton, Morgan Cross, Karen Enns, Joan MacLeod, Sheila Munro, Bill Gaston, Dan MacIsaac, and Frances Backhouse.

"It's a great event," she says, noting there will be three panels at UVic on Saturday to address the "Victoria" theme.

The master class at the Oak Bay branch library on Sunday (run by Carla Funk) will likely be full. A panel discussion that afternoon involving Judy LeBlanc, Joanna Streetly, and Marilyn Bowering will revolve around the theme "Shaped by Islands."

"It's a little bit of everything," Maftei enthuses, "a celebration of local writers who will be reading their work—which is the discussion focus during the panels." The theme, she says, "has allowed us to stay close to home in a good way, and celebrate what's happening now."

Preceding the main events, on March 8 at the Downtown branch of the library, the six shortlisted authors of the recently-created "Word Prize" will read their micro-works—all 400-words of them. The winners, Maftei says, managed to be "powerful and evocative in that short word count; we have some great material." Arleen Paré judged the submissions.

WordsThaw is definitely not an "exclusive" event, Maftei assures. "It's a great event for anyone with an interest in what's being produced today, taking part in a writing community in a formal way, or just as an interest of theirs." More participation, she says, just adds to the "rich and diverse writing community we have in Victoria that will hopefully continue."

At various locations. See malahatreview.ca.—Mollie Kaye

"BC FOREST" EMILY CARR, 34 X 22 3/4 INCHES, OIL ON PAPER

March 3–16

HISTORIC AND POST-WAR CANADIAN ART

Madrona Gallery

This special exhibition will feature important works from some of Canada's most influential artists of the 20th Century. Featuring rare paintings from artists including Jean Paul Riopelle, Emily Carr, E.J. Hughes, Lawren Harris, A.J. Casson, Frank H. Johnston, Arthur Lismer, Fredrick Banting, Ted Harrison, Gordon Smith, Takao Tanabe, Jack Shadbolt, F.M. Bell-Smith and many more. Openiing reception on March 3, 1-4pm. 606 View St, 250-380-4660, www.madronagallery.com.

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Throughout March/April

BILL BOYD

The Avenue Gallery

With retirement on the horizon, Bill Boyd's latest collection of crystalline glaze ceramics will be some of his last in the gallery. Meticulously crafting pottery for over 45 years, Bill fuses Scandinavian influence with Asian aesthetic, bringing a classic simplicity to his masterful vessels. Bill Boyd began making pottery in 1970, in Sweden, where he worked with several talented potters and taught ceramics. He has become one of the leading names in crystalline glazing, and his work has been exhibited in Europe and North America. 2184 Oak Bay Ave, 250-598-2184, www.theavenuegallery.com

"PINK SKY 1" LEAH MCINNIS, DIGITAL PROJECTION

April 7–22

LEAH MCINNIS: "THE FROG IN THE DESERT AT TWILIGHT"

Xchanges Gallery

Taken together as space, time and subject, *The Frog in the Desert at Twilight* is an exhibition of visual art that considers the multifarious potentials of being slippery in the magical year of 2018. Leah McInnis is a Canadian conceptual artist currently living and working in Victoria. Her solo practice is influenced by MOPE Collective, of which she is a founding member. Opening reception April 6, 7-9pm. Gallery hours during exhibition, 12-4pm Sat & Sun. 2333 Government St, Suite 6E, 250-382-0442, www.xchangesgallery.org.

"ICEBERGS–ELLESMERE ISLAND" NICHOLAS BOTT, 36 X 48 INCHES, OIL ON CANVAS

March 17–31

NICHOLAS BOTT

Madrona Gallery

On the 60th anniversary of his move to Canada, the exhibition will feature a selection of new works, alongside paintings from Bott's personal collection. This show will highlight the various influences in the artist's work over the years. Originally from the Netherlands, Bott moved to northern BC as a teenager. Inspired by the dramatic landscape of this and other provinces, Bott has explored and painted many regions of the country, including a recent trip to the Arctic. Opening reception March 17, 1-4pm. 606 View St, 250-380-4660, www.madronagallery.com.

"TAKING FLIGHT NO. 2" DIANA DURRAND, 18 X 22 INCHES FRAMED, SOFT PASTEL ON PAPER

April 10–21

100 SLEEPING DANDELIONS

Gage Gallery

100 Sleeping Dandelions addresses our ambiguous relationship to *Taraxacum Officinale:* is it a weed, an herb, or a flower? Is it an invasive species, or a hardy, totally edible plant that has adapted to its new environment? Artist Diana Durrand, who confesses to pulling dandelions from her lawn and garden, explores the beauty and utility of these ubiquitous wildflowers in delicate drawings, bold paintings and elegant sculptures. Opening reception Sunday, April 15th, 1 to 4pm. 2031 Oak Bay Avenue, 250-592-2760. www.gagegallery.ca.

"Western Isle Beach" by Patricia Johnston, 36 x 48 inches, oil on canvas

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University of Victoria Libraries & Legacy Art Galleries
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MOTHA Museum of Trans Hirstory & Art

Rinaldo • April 19–29

"PEOPLE SOMETIMES FORGET OPERA IS THEATRE," says Glynis Leyshon, director of Pacific Opera Victoria (POV)'s upcoming production of Handel's baroque classic *Rinaldo*. Because of its fantastical subject matter, the opera is "quite a departure" for the POV veteran. "The challenges are enormous when you look beyond the music to the libretto and presentation. There's a lot of transformational magic elements; it was meant to be spectacle. It's a challenge for anybody who decides to do [it]."

Making a special-effects, fanciful period piece relevant to modern audiences requires some creative questioning, and Leyshon is grateful to be partnered in this effort with production designer Pam Johnson, a longtime colleague. "You want to look at it with fresh eyes…why are we doing this piece, beyond the music?" Leyshon says there are technical considerations as well. The 17th century stagings of *Rinaldo*, with dragons, magicians, and "all sorts of spectacular imagery" was, she says, designed to be performed in a specific container, and "the Royal is not a Baroque opera theatre."

The pair decided to see if there was a way to keep the sense of wonder and innocence—and make it meaningful. They hit on the idea of setting the piece in WWII London, using the pretext of three children listening to a broadcast of *Rinaldo* through a floor-model radio. It is through the children's imaginative visions that the story unfolds. "The backdrop you'll see is a set of row houses—archetypal English," says Leyshon. "An exterior wall pops forward to reveal the interior of the house: rooms, staircase, table…the radio will play, and create the setting of the piece." As the children listen, "elements within the house will change and transform. Pam and I are working with a young animator to do some video as well…that kind of element will be woven into the aesthetic of the design."

Rinaldo's libretto is providing a certain "reality"—Christians versus Muslims, warring in ancient Jerusalem (far too politically loaded these days, but not in Handel's time). Leyshon and Johnson are instead using the allied forces battling evil during the World War II as the fortifying basis of the children's whimsical visions.

Leyshon, as a child, remembers being encouraged to visualize a story while listening to music—"what do you see, what are the pictures, what is the music telling you, what can you imagine?" She and Johnson, along with conductor Timothy Vernon, are hoping *Rinaldo* audiences will appreciate their efforts to conjure some of Handel's 300-year-old magic.

Rinaldo: April 19, 21, 27 at 8pm; April 29 at 2:30pm at the Royal Theatre. Sung in Italian, with English surtitles. Pre-performance talk one hour before each curtain. Tickets start at $25, www.rmts.bc.ca, or 250-385-0222. —Mollie Kaye

"ISLAND IN MIST" (FIELD STUDY) BY BRENT LYNCH, OIL ON CANVAS, 20 X 16

Throughout March & April

BRENT LYNCH

The Avenue Gallery

Speaking of a painting trip by boat in the Great Bear Rain Forest, Brent Lynch says, "You feel far from the beaten path out there. A small protected bay off the many inlets gives good moorage and every evening you seek them out. You witness powerful sunsets giving way to dome-like starry skies then waking up surrounded by a morning marine front. This is classic west coast theatre. Like a mysterious curtain the mist rolls in and out. Now and then small broken islands would appear, then disappear. In this painting I was taken by the thick jungle growth on a small rocky island in stark contrast of its soft surroundings." 2184 Oak Bay Ave, 250-598-2184, www.theavenuegallery.com.

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Email: info@gagegallery.ca Open Tues – Sat 11am – 5pm

"STANDING TALL–HARLEQUIN DUCK" W. ALLAN HANCOCK, 10 X 12 INCHES, ACRYLIC

Throughout March/April

W. ALLAN HANCOCK

Peninsula Gallery

W. Allan Hancock has always had a fascination with the natural world. His art career began in 1989, when he accepted a full-time position as a wildlife artist for a greeting card company. He soon found gallery representation and a growing demand for his work. His artwork has been selected for numerous fund-raising projects for wildlife and habitat conservation purposes. Allan resides on Salt Spring Island and his paintings can be found in collections throughout Canada, the United States, Europe and Asia.100-2506 Beacon Ave, Sidney, 250-655-1282, www.pengal.com.

"BECOMING AN IMAGE, PERFORMANCE STILL NO. 4" CASSILS, 2013, NATIONAL THEATER STUDIO, LONDON

March 7 & 8

TRANS HIRSTORY IN 99 OBJECTS

UVic Campus / Open Space

Los Angeles-based Canadian performance artist Cassils evokes trans peoples' struggles for self-defence and self-preservation. UVic Legacy Art Galleries presents the exhibition *Trans Hirstory in 99 Objects,* a collaboration with UVic Visual Arts and Open Space, running until March 29. Special events: March 7, 7:30pm, "Becoming an Image" (performance), UVic Visual Arts Building Room 150; March 8, 7:30pm, artist's talk, Open Space, 2nd floor, 510 Fort St. Both events are free. More info: www.legacy.uvic.ca, 250-721-6562. Exhibit at 630 Yates St until March 29.

"THE DAWN OF DUSK" STEVEN ARMSTRONG, 36 X 60 INCHES, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

Throughout March/April

STEVEN ARMSTRONG

West End Gallery

Local artist Steven Armstrong's paintings explore the rugged landscapes and windy skies of Vancouver Island, and offer an opportunity to investigate a deeper relationship with the natural environment. Every painting is an individual communication with the idea of journey through the reality of change. Steven captures the beauty, drama, and culture of the island, contemplating and depicting the landscape that surrounds us in all of its ever-shifting and majestic glory. 1203 Broad St, 250-388-0009, www.westendgalleryltd.com.

"BYE BYE BABY BLUE" ROSE COWLES, 48 X 48 INCHES, ACRYLIC & COLLAGE ON CANVAS

March 25–April 15

19TH ANNUAL LOOK SHOW

Bay Centre / Temple Building

The Look Show, now in its 19th year, is an all-comers event presented by the Victoria Arts Council (VAC). Billed as an "affordable art fair," the show features work from hundreds of local artists. Applications for submissions will be accepted until March 11. To submit work, see the VAC website: vicartscouncil.ca. There will be exhibitions at three locations: the historic Temple Building at 525 Fort St, at VAC headquarters in the Bay Centre, and in the lower level of the Bay Centre near Ardene. Hours: Monday-Saturday, 10am-6pm, Sunday 11am-6pm.

March 3-18
Clare Thomas
"My Mother's House"
Opening reception:
Friday March 2, 7-9pm

April 7-22
Leah McInnis
"The Frog in the Desert at Twilight"
Opening reception:
Friday, April 6, 7-9pm

Xchanges Gallery
2333 Government Street
250.382.0442
www.xchangesgallery.org
Open Saturdays & Sundays, 12-4

Xchanges Gallery gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the CRD

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April 10 -21
Reception Sunday, April 15, 1-4

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Preview at dianadurrand.com

2031 Oak Bay Ave 250-592-2760 gagegallery.ca

MADRONA GALLERY

"Hellwell Bluffs" Rick Bond, 30 x 30 inches, acrylic on canvas

Rick Bond April 7 - 21
Opening Reception April 7, 1-4pm
606 View Street • 250.380.4660 • www.madronagallery.com

"Mystic Beach" by Dana Statham, 24 x 36 inches, acrylic on canvas

Dana Statham • March 26–April 22

DANA STATHAM has packed a lot into the last year, most of it living—not painting. She's very early into an artistic career that doesn't, at this point, feel like one to her. The amount of time she's been able to devote to her creative endeavours isn't as much as she'd like, but she also fears making art into something she does to pay the bills. Right now, she makes her living doing something entirely unrelated, but has a designated studio space developing in the home she recently purchased and is renovating with her new husband.

Stylistically, if artists E.J. Hughes and Maud Lewis had a "love child," it could very well be Statham. An auto-didact like Lewis, she imparts both joy and reverence into her acrylic-on-canvas coastal imagery with the detail, sophistication, and draftsmanship of Hughes. Response to her work has been very positive; she sold out her most recent shows on Hornby Island, where she's spent a lot of time and which she loves to paint. She's eager to see how Victorians will receive her work.

I congratulate Statham on her past success; she demurs. "There's something so unique about Hornby; it's so many people's 'happy place' and haven—they want any piece of it they can get…to take home with them." Yet when she was painting arctic scenes during her time in Nunavut, "even that, people related to, and were excited about, so I don't know...capturing the sense of place is what people love and connect with."

Dawn Casson, owner of The Gallery at Mattick's Farm, says it's more than just the subject matter of Statham's pieces that her clientele is eagerly queuing for. "I've already got people asking if [her pieces] are available for sale before the show." When she says that they have to wait until the pieces are hung, "They say, 'I'll be phoning you at 10am on the 26th, then,'" Casson recounts with a chuckle.

"We're very excited about her pieces," Casson continues. "I can't wait to see what they look like hanging on the walls…it's just going to be stunning." She discovered Statham's work the modern way—on Instragram—and tracked the artist down to see if she'd be interested in having a show there. Statham, whose bike commute to her work at Saanich Peninsula Hospital took her past Mattick's Farm, says, "I would pop into the gallery, and it was like [Casson] had curated all of my favourite artists into one spot," so she felt she "would be in good company. I was happy to say yes."

While Casson would have loved to create a solo show for Statham, this past year of life, work, moving, renovations and marriage all meant just seven pieces to display. To create a full show, Casson has partnered Statham with painter Wendy Oppelt, a veteran of the gallery whose loose, lively, "macro-impressionist" painting style serves as a foil to Statham's meticulous, graphic compositions.

Statham says of her seven paintings, "I plotted them all on a map," and they ended up being a "circumnavigation of Vancouver Island… from the very north end at Cape Scott Park, to the Lochside Trail, Mystic Beach, Tofino…it happened to work out that it was a coastal exploration." In the past, she would paint from imagination, but now works with photographs "to get the subtleties right." While she knows people will likely be familiar with the vistas, she does take "a heavy dose of artistic license to tweak a composition…I try not to get too tied to a photo; it takes the fun out of it." —*Mollie Kaye*

Paintings by Dana Statham and Wendy Oppelt, The Gallery at Mattick's Farm, March 26-April 22, Monday-Saturday 10am-5:30pm, Sundays 11am-5pm. Opening reception April 14. 1-4pm. 109-5325 Cordova Bay Rd, 250-658-8333 or thegalleryatmatticksfarm.com.

(TOP) "ALL MY RELATIONS" (DETAIL), DAPHNE BOYER
(BOTTOM) "MEMORY BONES" MAUREEN GRUBEN

April 11–July 7

THE TIME OF THINGS

Legacy Gallery

The Time of Things proposes to challenge the binary of traditional and contemporary art. It considers the continuum of Indigenous customary practices into contemporary Indigenous art through the work of five women artists: Daphne Boyer, Maureen Gruben, Susan Pavel, Skeena Reece, and Marika Echachis Swan. Guest curated by France Trépanier. Open Wed to Sat 10am-4pm, UVic Legacy Art Gallery, Downtown, 630 Yates St. www.legacy.uvic.ca.

Gary Geddes wins Freedom to Read Award

LOCAL WRITER and human rights activist Gary Geddes has won The Writers' Union of Canada's 2018 Freedom to Read Award. The award is presented annually by TWUC in recognition of work that is passionately supportive of free expression. Past recipients include Deborah Campbell, Mohamed Fahmy, Janine Fuller, and Lawrence Hill.

Credited with over 35 books, Geddes has written about war crimes, prisoners of war, conquest, and the violence institutionalized by government policy. He has also donated generously to scholarly work around social sciences and environmental studies.

Focus' Amy Reiswig interviewed Geddes in 2014. She wrote: "Geddes is able to explore both our humanity and inhumanity through extraordinary acts of imaginative intimacy." Geddes told her then: "Putting feeling into words is like putting light through a prism. It comes out differently, but hopefully more interesting. It doesn't mean it's not authentic; storytelling can make things more true."

Though he's written about situations all over the world, his most recent book is *Medicine Unbundled: A Journey through the Minefields of Indigenous Health Care*. In it, he tells the story of the abuse Indigenous peoples endured in so-called "Indian hospitals" that were operational until the 1970s.

For that book, he spent four years travelling across Canada speaking with elders, many of whom told stories of forced sterilization and gratuitous drug and surgical experiments, often leading to long-lasting trauma.

Geddes has won many other major awards, including Chile's Gabriela Mistral Prize and the Lieutenant Governor's Award for Literary Excellence in British Columbia (2008). He lives on Thetis Island.

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

Throughout March/April

MARK HEINE

Peninsula Gallery

Mark David Heine was raised by artists to be an artist. He spent his childhood wandering his father's massive warehouse studio, absorbing the progress and process of the monumental projects underway, and also toured and sketched in the great cities of the world. Heine has come to realize he's a story teller. He creates a written narrative to accompany each of his works. Each of his paintings is a captured moment in a larger story. Marrying fiction to painting is the focus of his most recent works–the Siren series. 100-2506 Beacon Ave, Sidney, 250-655-1282, www.pengal.com.

Vancouver Island School of Art

March & April Workshops

Drawing as Meditation *Mar 4* 10am-5pm $175

Watercolour: Abstract Composition *Mar 4* 10am-5pm $175

Collage: Image, Layering & Design *Mar 11* 10am-5pm $175

Islamic Geometric Design *Mar 18* 10am-5pm $175

Drawing Perspective: All You Need to Know *Mar 25* 10am-5pm $175

Mixed Media and the Photograph *Mar 25* 10am-5pm $175

Colour in Painting *Apr 8* 10am-5pm $120

Watercolour: Botanical Patterns *Apr 15* 10am-5pm $175

Printmaking with Acrylics *Apr 15* 10am-5pm $175

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Plays with purpose and laughter

MOLLIE KAYE

Zelda Dean sees theatre as a way to break down barriers.

My first encounter with Zelda Dean is at the old brick Congregation Emanu-El Synagogue on Blanshard. She's enthusiastically welcoming people who have come to see the Neil Simon play she's directing. A friend of mine in the cast invited me, and I'm feeling pretty disoriented. "There's a theatre in here?" I ask incredulously. Black curtains and a simple stage are set up in a room with about 80 chairs. Although my expectations are not high, I get a surprisingly wonderful evening of inspiring theatre, and I'm intensely curious about Dean and her tiny, synagogue-based company, Bema (pronounced "BEE-ma") Productions.

We arrange to meet on a sunny Thursday afternoon, again at the historically significant synagogue, which was consecrated in 1863. This time, I get to see both Dean and the theatre in their day jobs: she is the synagogue's office manager, and the theatre looks like a smallish cafeteria, adjacent to a commercial kitchen. I shake my head, marvelling at how the space was so cunningly transformed. She explains that a congregant—after hearing Dean confidently quip that she could easily create a "black box" theatre in the space and stage performances there—stepped up with some cash and said, "Okay, do it."

This is the magic—and mystery—of Dean, a small but mighty force to be reckoned with. The spry, elfin woman in her mid-70s has an enthusiastic, can-do twinkle, and clearly, her wheels are always turning. As we chat, I can almost hear the sound of the gears. She comes up with a vision and inspires people to help her realize it; wherever she is, big things get done. When she was asked to handle the congregation's administrative tasks, she saw "they needed a tough old bird." A fierce advocate for the synagogue and their generous, progressive initiatives in the community, their funding shortfalls served as her inspiration to create Bema Productions, whose ticket revenues directly support Emanu-El and other Victoria non-profits.

Dean isn't just any office manager. She has a long, successful history in the performing arts, and was a major part of expanding the Calgary theatre scene. She and her husband helped found that city's largest community theatre, and in the 1980s, they created two

PHOTO: TONY BOUNSALL

Zelda Dean

successful dinner theatres that ran for over 11 profitable years, employing "most of the union actors in Calgary." Completely unsubsidized, the industrious, creative couple fortified the city's cultural offerings and launched the careers of many Canadian performers.

The couple retired from their stage-based endeavours in the '90s and relocated to Victoria to be near their adult daughter who was on her own with young children. Dean then focused primarily on family, and says, "I thought my theatre career was finished." Between amateur and professional productions in Calgary, she had produced and directed 110 plays. "It was a great run, I had lots to be grateful for…I let it go."

Dean was approached a decade ago to fill the position of office manager, and "be the hub of the wheel here." The grandkids were older, so she said yes. Her work showed her "how much good the synagogue was doing, but the place is not rolling in money." Then came the congregation's 150th anniversary. She got pulled into an arts committee, "kicking and screaming," to create six public events for 2015. One of the six events was a small original theatre production, a collaboration with UVic. "It rekindled a little flame that I thought had gone out, and I started to think, 'What could I do? They're always struggling for money…I'm a professional director, entrepreneur…I can make good theatre; I can find good people.'"

Find them she has. Bema's production of *Old Ladies Guide to Survival* won Best Drama at the 2016 Fringe. Professional actors often take parts in Bema casts as unpaid volunteers, enjoying what one reviewer called "detailed, sure-footed direction… parsing mood shifts and embracing the steely drama beneath the jokes."

The company's upcoming summer play is the Canadian premiere of *Kalamazoo*, a drama (with funny moments) about a mismatched couple, written by Mel Brooks' daughter Michelle. The April production, *Lessons*, is also a drama, and another Canadian premiere, written by Wendy Graf.

Dean wants to entertain, and yet hopes all of her productions will make a difference. "I don't want to lecture people, or pound them on the head with it. I want to make them laugh, cry…think about something maybe they haven't before."

For *17 Stories*, Bema's inaugural production, Dean commissioned a script from award-winning Canadian playwright Caroline Russell-King; she wanted a piece that addressed grief and loss. Seventeen people were interviewed about different kinds of losses: pets, jobs, family members. "It was almost overwhelming," she recounts. "I had six actors who portrayed 65 characters in 17 different stories. The audience was blown away."

In Hebrew, the word *bima* means "altar," and Bema's name is an homage to the sanctuary where some of its performances take place. While this theatre company isn't a religious thing, its core group of volunteers are synagogue congregants. With only about 1000 identified Jews in Victoria, the vast majority of Bema's growing audience is gentiles who probably wouldn't have otherwise ended up inside the building (unless they're touring the historically significant landmarks downtown). Once inside, she hopes everyone can appreciate well-produced plays whose messages transcend any creed or ideas of separateness.

Dean must have *déja vù*; her earliest theatrical organization efforts were in 1960s Calgary, at a time when Jews were not allowed to join the country clubs. As one of a handful of people collaborating with a transplanted rabbi and his wife to create community theatre productions that brought Jews and non-Jews

together—onstage, backstage, and in the audience, "we set out to get more people into a synagogue, to see 'hey folks, we're all the same. You're not going to get hit by a lightning bolt as soon as you walk in here.'" With Bema, she says, "I want to use plays that say something that's of value, in an entertaining way, and I want to open the doors of the synagogue."

Bringing diverse people together to perform and to watch is only part of the picture. Bema is also channeling resources to non-profits. The 12 performances of their last show, Neil Simon's *Prisoner of Second Avenue*, brought in 1100 people. "We raised $8500 profit for the synagogue for their programs, and six non-profit shows where each charity raised $1000," Dean says proudly. "People believe in what we're doing, so they are generous with their time, energy, and creativity. We're a joyful company to work for; the thank-you letters blow me away." Among many charitable initiatives, Congregation Emanu-El supports families in need through the Burnside-Gorge Community Centre, creates birthday parties at Our Place, and sponsored a Syrian refugee family.

As someone over 25 years younger than Dean, I'm humbled by her seemingly boundless energy and productivity, but I can tell working hard is her happy place. "People ask, 'Why are you doing this? You're 76 years old'…I have to. Creative people have to create; we can't not." She's no martyr, though. "I'm giving, and I'm receiving. If we don't get something out of what we're giving, we can't do it for long. I get tremendous satisfaction out of creating a piece, and knowing it is a benefit to others…As artists, we have to be getting something out of it for ourselves. I feel grateful that I have this opportunity to do what I love doing, and at the same time make a difference, helping to make the world a better place."

Bema Productions presents Lessons, *written by Wendy Graf, directed by Zelda Dean. April 12-22 at Congregation Emanu-El, 1461 Blanshard. Tickets available online through ticketrocket.com or call 250-382-0615.*

Mollie Kaye can only hope her own work as a performer and writer is, in some small way, making the world a better place.

THE GALLERY
AT MATTICK'S FARM

"If a Daiquiri were a Flower" Taryn Brown, 36 x 36 inches

"San Josef Bay" Dana Statham, 24 x 36 inches

Taryn Brown & Sandra Froher
February 26 – March 25
Opening reception
Saturday March 3, 1-4pm
Artists in attendance

Dana Statham & Wendy Oppelt
March 26 – April 22
Opening reception
Saturday April 14, 1-4pm
Artists in attendance

109-5325 Cordova Bay Road • 250-658-8333 • www.thegalleryatmatticksfarm.com

April 21–May 3
MARY ANN LAING: HAPPY CHILDHOOD
West End Gallery

Born in Victoria, Mary Ann Laing has been painting for over 30 years. She enjoys a variety of mediums, but oils are her favourite. Most of her subjects are bold and colourful renditions sensitively inspired by the landscape of Vancouver Island, but she also enjoys still life work. Her paintings are among collections locally and internationally. A signature member of the Federation of Canadian Artists, her work has been included in many exhibitions over the past 25 years.1203 Broad St, 250-388-0009, www.westendgalleryltd.com.

PHOTO: PAULA LOBO

Ballet Hispánico • April 6 & 7

IN APRIL, DANCE VICTORIA is bringing in Ballet Hispánico, a New York-based contemporary company whose focus is latin culture—a mandate which, given the current cultural and political climate in the US, lets us assume we'll get more than just aesthetics.

This touring triple-bill presentation features the work of three Latina choreographers, who are using #shecreates to promote it. Inspired by iconography and issues inherent to their respective cultural backgrounds, they provide a window into worlds we don't see much here in Victoria. Marina Kennedy of *Broadway World* proclaims that Ballet Hispánico shows have a "…real wow factor. Energetic, entertaining and always surprising, [fusing] the finest modern ballet with a fantastic Latino flair."

If you've seen any of the posters or ads heralding the performance, you've gotten a glimpse of the dancers in "Linea Recta" (Straight Line), a deconstruction of flamenco by Annabelle Lopez Ochoa. The Colombian-Belgian choreographer says in a Ballet Hispánico video, "I always try to tap into those roots that I have, my background. And this time it is flamenco, which I studied for seven years in school." The energetic piece features costumes in bullfighter-cape red: shirtless men wear high-waisted pants, accentuating the iconic Spanish male silhouette; women hold fans and wear clever "skirts" that are actually several metres of serpentine, scarlet flounce, winding and unwinding around the dancer in myriad ways, echoing the flight and flourishes of a flamenco dancer's ruffles.

"Con Brazos Abiertos" (With Open Arms), by Houston-born choreographer Michelle Manzaneles, has Radiohead's rock song "Creep" as the soundtrack of her piece expressing the conflicted feelings of a teenager suspended between two cultures. *The Dallas News* describes Manzanales' coming of age in Texas: "With pressure from the majority culture to fit in—which children struggle with no matter their roots—and from her family to stay true to her background, it took Manzanales years to consider bringing her personal struggles into her art."

While it may sound mathematical, "Catorce Dieciséis" (3.14), Tania Pérez-Salas' dance piece inspired by the number pi, is more about humanity than geometry. The Mexican choreographer told the *LA Times*: "When I go to do something, like see a film or theater, I want to leave the theater feeling different from when I came. It's not about understanding. It's about emotion. It's a gift to the audience. I want them…to simply let go and be open to what they're going to see and let the dancers communicate their feelings with their dancing. I want the emotions to be tangible."

April 6 & 7 at 7:30pm at the Royal Theatre. Tickets from $29 at rmts.bc.ca or 250-386-6121.—Mollie Kaye

PROGRAMS IN EARTH LITERACIES

March & April Events

Courage Earth
with **Lisa Gordon**
Four Tuesdays, March 20 & 27, April 3 & 10
10am – 12pm; $75 or $20 drop in
Friends Meeting House, 1831 Fern Street

Disciples on the Road to Emmaus
a lecture with **Diarmuid O'Murchu**
Tuesday, April 3, 7pm – 8:30pm; $20
First Metropolitan United Church, 932 Balmoral Road

Incarnating God upon our Earth
with **Diarmuid O'Murchu**
Wednesday, April 4, 9:30am – 3:30pm; $60
Please bring lunch, refreshments provided
First Metropolitan United Church, 932 Balmoral Rd.

Poetry for the Earth
with **Denis Donnelly**
Friday, April 6, 7 – 9pm and Saturday, April 7, 10am – 4pm; $70
Please bring lunch, refreshments provided
Friends Meeting House, 1831 Fern Street

Powers of the Universe, Part II
with **Gertie Jocksch**
Five Tuesdays, April 17 & 24, May 1, 8, & 15, 10am – 12pm
$85 or $20 drop in
Friends Meeting House, 1831 Fern Street

Toward a Functional Spirituality for a Climate Changing World
with **Mike Bell**
Friday, April 13, 7 – 9pm and Saturday, April 14, 9:30am – 3:30pm
Residential $185, Commuter $115
Bethlehem Centre, 2371 Arbot Road, Nanaimo

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Orchestrating a life

MOLLIE KAYE

Conductor Yariv Aloni lands, learns, and leads in Victoria.

Yariv Aloni

The custom-designed music space Victoria conductor and violist Yariv Aloni and his cellist wife Pam have added to their cozy, mid-century home nestled at the foot of Mt Tolmie is a "wow," but it isn't fussy. After we descend a staircase and traverse a dim hallway, the spacious room, featuring vaulted ceilings and huge windows, seems to come from nowhere. Brilliant, warm, open, and full of unexpected treasures, it is much like Aloni himself, who inspires these same descriptors as a musician and leader. His unexpected journey—from a humble kibbutz in Israel, to where I encounter him now in this magnificent room—was, he says with a smile, "serendipitous."

Aloni is perhaps best known here as the conductor of both the Greater Victoria Youth Orchestra (GVYO) and the Victoria Chamber Orchestra (VCO). He's had both of these gigs for over 30 years combined, which speaks volumes about his skill and strength in the role. High-level amateur groups can be very tricky to manage. Players who aren't drawing a paycheque from rehearsals and performances are motivated solely by their love of music. If he fawns, flatters, or bores them, he's sunk. If he overwhelms or paralyzes them with fear, likewise. Within realistic boundaries, he inspires them to push their edges and achieve excellence. At the end of every successful concert, he leaves them with the sense that they, not he, accomplished great things.

If this sounds simple, I can assure you: it is not. In the world of conducting, or any type of leadership, it is the stuff of genius. The brilliance Aloni brings to his role in this community came through fortuitous connections and opportunities at just the right moments. When happily and humbly articulating the highlights of his development and career as both an instrumentalist and a conductor, punctuating phrases with laughter and smiles in his enthusiastic, Hebrew-accented English, he gestures with his hands as if working marionettes from above—indicating that a larger force was at work, orchestrating every nuance of his musical path.

In the communal 1960s kibbutz Aloni called home during his childhood in a rural part of Israel, musical training was deemed a luxury, and not offered to everyone. Aloni's parents were musicians, but they didn't decide how and when he and his three musical siblings would be educated. Children were tested to ascertain what strengths they had; 8-year-old Yariv's assessor decided he had "a good ear," and gave him a violin instead of the coveted piano lessons he'd seen his older sister receive. "All I wanted was to play the piano…and I was devastated," he says, chuckling heartily. "But then I got the violin, and I was very intrigued." Still enormously upset about not being given piano lessons, the determined boy taught himself to play on one of the kibbutz's communal instruments. "That showed them, a little," Aloni says slyly.

As a teenager, Aloni was introduced to the viola, and says, "The moment I started playing it, I found my voice. Instead of playing notes, I started playing phrases, and started playing music. Instead of words, it was sentences." As a player in the regional kibbutzim youth orchestra, he had the joyful new experience of performing music "that you can't play alone." From there, he discovered chamber music, "and then the world just opened, it was like an explosion."

At 19, he and three other teenagers formed a string quartet at Isaac Stern's newly-founded Jerusalem Music Center. "The quartet changed my life; we started doing concerts, we went abroad, we met many great players that came to give master classes…The Guarneri Quartet came to listen to us," he says, and arranged for them to study at the University of Maryland. Like many successful young string players, they ended up amicably parting ways, and Aloni was immediately snapped up by Penderecki, a Wisconsin-based Polish quartet looking for a viola.

In 1991, they were invited to be quartet-in-residence at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario. Far from his culture of origin, Aloni says he surprisingly felt more comfortable. "I was a bit like a fish out of water in Israel," he admits, saying the tendency to "say exactly what you are thinking all the time" in that culture didn't really jive with his sensibilities. Europe had its attractions, but he was always aware of being "other;" in Canada, he felt he belonged, even as a "foreigner."

At a festival he organized in Waterloo, Aloni met his wife Pam, the cellist in the UVic-based Lafayette String Quartet. If they wanted to live together, one of them would have to bow out of their group. We all know which one did: the Lafayette has celebrated over three decades with continuous personnel, and Aloni sees his move west as another fortuitous decision. "Everyone I was meeting said, 'Welcome to Victoria!' It was kind of shocking to me, especially after the years in the US, and even Israel. There had been a sense of community there, but never as strong as I had felt it in Victoria…things just started to unfold for me."

After relocating here in 1994, he was offered the opportunity to conduct the VCO, and gamely took on the challenge, even though he "hardly knew how to conduct." After a year or so, he says, "I kind of ran out of knowledge." He scanned the horizon and saw that acclaimed Hungarian conductor János Sándor had landed at UVic as Artist-in-Residence and Conductor of the University of Victoria Orchestra and Chorus. (Sandor subsequently was also appointed Music Director of the Greater Victoria Youth Orchestra, where Aloni became the associate conductor, then successor after Sándor's death in 2010).

> "THE MOMENT I STARTED PLAYING [the viola], I found my voice. Instead of playing notes, I started playing phrases, and started playing music. Instead of words, it was sentences." —*Yariv Aloni*

Immediately after seeing Sándor conduct, he said, "That's what I want." He approached the maestro and requested instruction; Sándor said he had never taught conducting, but agreed to try.

What followed was over a decade of edification and mentorship. "He became really almost like my father," Aloni recounts tenderly. "What this man gave me was everything I knew about conducting… Most people study for two years, and then you start conducting, and you learn as you go. But I had the privilege of working with him and conducting at the same time for more than ten years…It was a wonderful relationship."

Sándor inspired Aloni to revel in the leadership and coaching role of working with youth and amateur adult players. "I get to know a lot of musicians, not just my colleagues in the symphony or at UVic. There's a whole bunch of amazing musicians and players who don't do that for a living…they're as dedicated as professionals…they do it really because they love it, and that's an incredible blessing, to work with people like that."

In March and April, Aloni will be conducting two concerts with the GVYO, which features the best players in the region, ages 13 through university. "They're an amazing orchestra. I think most people in town would be incredibly surprised. People who have never heard the orchestra, before they come to the hall, they may imagine a school orchestra," but, at times, he says, "if you close your eyes, you don't know who's playing. They sound as good as anyone, at least to my ears," Aloni says with a proud smile. "I may be a little biased."

Aloni is able to achieve the highest levels of musicality with his players because he seems to have extracted every ounce of learning and compassion from his own challenges and triumphs as a person and as a musician. He has humility, but is not self-effacing; he is eager to take responsibility for his mistakes; and he can celebrate his achievements as his own, without excluding others and the roles they have played in facilitating them. Sitting in a comfortable chair, talking about his good fortune to do what he loves, he marvels at how every experience, in retrospect, fits together, as if it were all arranged just for him. After spending time here in this surprising, well-planned space on a sunny Victoria morning, it does seem meant to be.

Greater Victoria Youth Orchestra, conducted by Yariv Aloni, March 11 and April 29, 2:30pm, Farquhar Auditorium. $10 - $25, UVic Ticket Centre, 250-721-8480, www.tickets.uvic.ca, Victoria Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Yariv Aloni, April 27, 8:00pm, First Metropolitan United Church. $15-$20, Long & McQuade, Ivy's Bookshop, or at the door. 250-598-1966 or victoriachamberorchestra.org.

Mollie Kaye was also raised in a musical family, and loves that Yariv Aloni remembers attending a workshop in the 1980s given by her violinist uncle, Tom Kornacker.

Not in our space

MONICA PRENDERGAST

Harassment, bullying and theatre culture.

This column will be a difficult one to write. Wading into the muddy waters churned up by disclosures of sexual harassment and rape in the entertainment industry feels challenging. The online debates have been at times strident and divisive. People have been judged and sentenced without ever appearing in court. But in the wake of the appalling lack of justice in the sexual assault trials of Bill Cosby and Jian Ghomeshi, it is understandable that some women are taking a more direct course.

Publicizing experiences of sexual harassment and assault, and seeking damages in civil court, is getting results. The number of men who have been outed and have disappeared in the wake of the Harvey Weinstein revelations has been staggering. A tsunami has hit and these noxious men have been swept away. This should feel good, and at times it does, but at other times I wonder about what is happening. I worry about younger women slapping the label of "Victim" on themselves and wearing it proudly, like a banner. Is this what women's liberation looks like? That women who have suffered under victimhood can transmute that into a new banner of pride, "Survivor"?

These matters feel too weighty for a theatre column. So I want to tighten my focus to consider bullying and harassment in my industry.

In a report released in January by *The Stage* (England's newspaper on the performing arts industry), over 1000 theatre artists were surveyed about their experiences of harassment and bullying. Over 40 percent of respondents reported that they had experienced harassment in the workplace, and over 30 percent reported cases of sexual harassment. Sexual assault was reported by 8 percent of respondents. Shockingly, it is backstage workers who report the highest levels of abuse: stage managers, assistant stage managers and technicians. In these cases, it is often actors, as well as directors and designers, who are doing the bullying. The Canadian Actors' Equity Association also surveyed over 1000 members recently, with similar results. Nearly half of those surveyed said they had either witnessed or been the object of personal or sexual harassment.

PHOTO: CANADIAN FILM CENTRE

Albert Shultz

What makes theatre such a bullying industry? There will be those who wish to downplay the problem by talking about artistic temperament: where there is creativity and genius, there is also anger and vexation. This is nonsense, of course. The problem is one of power.

Reports from professional theatre associations and unions have consistently called the theatre world out for what it has been, and remains to be, in large part: a boys' club. Despite over 50 years of feminism, and its calls for gender equity, women in theatre still live in a man's world. Two-thirds of leadership roles in Canadian theatre are held by men. Men most often run theatres as artistic directors, write the plays and direct them. For a young female artist entering such a male-dominated industry, often having been trained to tolerate harassment and abuse as part of the job, what is to be done?

The revelations in December at Soulpepper Theatre, one of this country's largest not-for-profit theatre companies, hit close to home for those of us working in Canadian theatre. Four actresses announced they are suing the company and artistic director Albert Schultz. I have visited Soulpepper a number of times when in my previous hometown of Toronto. I have admired how Schultz so capably built up an excellent theatre company, including its new theatre spaces, in a city that already had a vibrant theatre culture. The company's accomplishments are many, including taking a number of shows for runs in New York. Their reputation has now been tarnished by allegations of long-term sexual harassment by its founder and leader.

I am in solidarity with these women, and others who have spoken out about how they have been treated at Soulpepper and elsewhere. And as a theatre educator, I am especially gratified to see attention turn to the problems of harassment and bullying in theatre training programs. In Toronto, there have been allegations of harassment by instructors at George Brown College and by the founder of the Randolph College of the Performing Arts. On my Facebook feed, I have been alarmed to read posts by former students of a number of post-secondary theatre programs who tell of persistent trauma caused by teachers who humiliated, berated and bullied them.

These so-called teachers should be ousted from their positions. But I know that in reality, most of them will continue to practice this kind of behavior. Why? Because it is understood that the world of theatre is a harsh one. Preparing for a career in performance involves preparing for a lot of negative judgment. There are still instructors (male and female) who feel it serves their students when they publically judge them as a way to toughen them up for the "real world." Calling students out for their weight, personality, physicality (including racial identity) or sexuality are all common ways to attack and undermine young acting students' confidence. And they are all things that these young people can do very little about. Well, you can lose weight, I suppose, but you can also develop an eating disorder as a result. This issue is endemic in the dance world, too, where girls are constantly told they can never be too thin.

But the tidal wave of #metoo is having its effect on this toxic culture. Canadian Equity has announced an anti-harassment program called Not in Our Space. Members of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres are adopting the campaign and encouraging anyone working in theatre to step forward and report issues when they arise. Of course,

THERE WILL BE THOSE who wish to downplay the problem by talking about artistic temperament…This is nonsense, of course. The problem is one of power.

this is easier said than done, especially when it's your job on the line. Yet it is an opening, the beginning moments of fostering a different kind of theatre culture.

I look forward to a time when gender equity becomes a reality in the cultural industries, and in all industries, as well as in government and other sectors. I am in my mid-50s and am a product of this unequal culture. In the final year of my BFA acting program, I had been cast in leading roles in two of my senior productions. Then outside directors were hired to direct these shows. Both of them recast me into character roles, no doubt due to my appearance alone. I am a character actor, this is true; but in my theatre education it would have been so powerful for me to have been stretched by the challenge of playing a different kind of role.

Later, when I was auditioning as a young actor in Toronto, a male director casually dismissed me by telling me to come back in 20 years, when I was the "right age" to play character roles. I stopped acting for over a decade, and became a drama educator. Although I have no regrets about entering into a very rewarding career, these wounds still sting, decades later.

Yet I count myself lucky not to have been subjected to the kinds of sexual harassment and assault that many of my peers, and subsequent generations of young women theatre artists, have suffered. I have witnessed harassment and abuse, though, and carry the weight of not speaking out soon enough, or forcefully enough, to protect others. No more. Not in our space.

Monica will be speaking about her research and publication project, *Web of Performance: An Ensemble Workbook*, as part of the University of Victoria Deans' Lecture Series at the main branch of the Victoria Public Library on March 9. This new curriculum guide, co-edited with Will Weigler, invites young people to express their issues around identity and power in performance-based ways.

The strength in vulnerability

AMY REISWIG

Claire Sicherman delves into the silent stories of her family's traumatic past.

Claire Sicherman

An array of old photographs stands on a wooden table: grandparents, great-grandparents, great-aunt and -uncle, even a great-great-grandmother against a backdrop of fruit trees. It's *Yom HaShoah,* and writer Claire Sicherman, her husband, and their young son stand together, honouring their many relatives murdered in the Holocaust, as well as those who survived—the ones who made this family's life possible. For each cherished name, they float a red anemone blossom in a bowl of water, saying: "We love you and we will always remember you."

Sicherman tells the story of this personal ritual in her new book *Imprint: A Memoir of Trauma in the Third Generation* (Caitlin Press, December 2017). It's a perfect illustration of her writing project as a whole. Her book, like her creative ceremony, is about learning how to keep memory alive; how to grieve, not just alone, but together; how to heal; and, ultimately, how to make meaning from that which makes no sense.

Sicherman's maternal grandparents, her *babi* and *deda,* were each the only members of their extended family to survive the Holocaust, and it was something they didn't discuss. Though she'd occasionally see her grandmother's Auschwitz tattoo peeking out from her sleeve, Sicherman writes: "We were all too scared to ask, to enter their trauma, to hurt them, to break them open." And so when her grandfather committed suicide when she was just 4 years old and, much more recently, when her grandmother died at age 102, many stories went with them to the grave. "For me," she explains over tea, "it was a twofold grief: my grandmother's death, and then the stories that were going to be buried with her—the ones I knew and the ones I would never know."

Being third generation, several removes from the events, Sicherman has photos and facts—and even her name, Claire, which connects her to her great-grandmother Klára. But who were these people whose lives filtered down to hers, shaping her? The third generation is a tricky place: distant enough to be able to tell stories others couldn't (or wouldn't), but also bearing the scars without the wounds—or living with different kinds of wounds. How do you heal from those? How do you own stories full of holes, questions, absence, silence?

Like that moment in her grandparents' life, about which she can only write: "I don't know how they are taken." Or when she imagines what the Nazi gas van drivers did and felt while their human cargo, including her Klára, died in the back. "Would the driver casually light a cigarette?…Would he roll down the window and yell at his buddy, something funny, a joke maybe, and they'd both laugh?" And then what do you do with everything that can't be written on the backs of photographs, or on paper at all, but is instead carried, in fragments, in the body through inherited intergenerational trauma, a genetic imprint? How do you talk about it all with the next generation to make sure we never repeat, never forget? This book offers Sicherman's tender exploration and determined excavation toward answers.

Sitting in the colourful Rock Salt Café on Salt Spring Island—where Sicherman, her husband and son recently moved (from Vancouver) in order to live more slowly and closer to nature—her warmth and generosity convey resilience and wisdom, specifically the wisdom to be curious rather than stay stuck in grief. But Sicherman doesn't see herself as courageous; rather, she says she was compelled to enter the dark places to connect to the stories, to the people, and, in many ways, to herself. "I felt something simmering beneath my skin," she tells me. "And as I began to write, I felt it was my ancestors voicing and encouraging me to tell their stories. I didn't have a choice. I felt like either I would write and it would kill me, or I wouldn't write and it would kill me. In the end, I think I chose the healthier path for myself," she smiles, "because it didn't kill me."

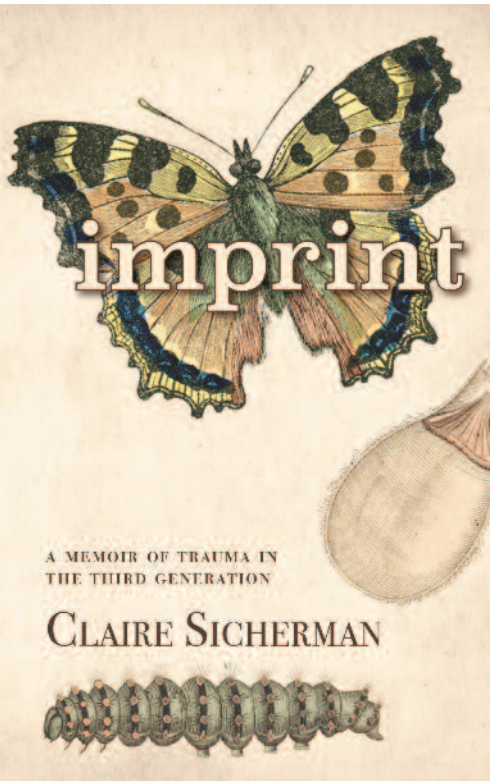
She also lets the book shine with the light of her life—her 11-year-old son, Ben—although we learn that he came into this world wrapped in a trauma of his own, asphyxiated by his umbilical cord and painstakingly revived. He was named after his father's favourite uncle, a Holocaust survivor, and Sicherman notes that some scholars have interpreted "Benjamin" to mean "build" or "rebuild." She writes directly to him in the book: "Ben, you are the son of our family…We are slowly gathering the pieces and building a life, creating a narrative. Your story is one of rebirth." It turns out hers is, too.

Told in four sections—roughly: the Holocaust and extended family; Ben; her relationship to herself; her journey into healing—each is a mix of memoir, journal entries, letters, and lists. With that fragmented structure, *Imprint* reflects Sicherman's inner experience, the movement

> "I FELT IT WAS MY ANCESTORS voicing and encouraging me to tell their stories. I didn't have a choice. I felt like either I would write and it would kill me, or I wouldn't write and it would kill me."—*Claire Sicherman*

of her mind as she makes discoveries and finds threads. And it shows her need to touch in and out, to protect herself as she (re)connects her ancestral past, her daily present, and her family's future.

At the end of their *Yom HaShoah* ritual, after the list of names has been read, there are so many flowers floating that they can't see the water. They carry the bowl out into the afternoon and together place the red anemones around the base of a blossoming cherry tree. Ben, now the fourth generation, pours out the water onto its roots. Like Sicherman's book, it's a gesture of transformation. For just as beautifully, she has poured out her tears and memories and love onto the page, and with an open heart has done her part to nurture strength, growth, and life.



"I don't feel brave," she tells me quietly but sternly. "But I do feel a bravery that's connected to being vulnerable. We see vulnerability as a weakness in our society. I've felt that myself: 'What's wrong with me? Why can't I be this strong person?' We wear masks in the outside world, and those masks are what keep us from connecting. I think those masks are a weakness. For me, healing is a process that's going to take my whole life. It's just something that I do, day to day."

Through her writing, she graciously lets us into her process—and encourages us to undertake a form of it ourselves, in relation to whatever family circumstances and unexplored family stories we, too, may have. Her hope is that we can all find a way in.

In Victoria, the Yom HaShoah commemoration event, organized by the Victoria Shoah Project, will take place 11am to noon on Sunday, April 15, at the Victoria Jewish Cemetery on Cedar Hill Road.

In her research and editing work at McGill's Holocaust oral testimony archive, Amy Reiswig was daily humbled and inspired by the power to be vulnerable and break the silence.

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Amalgacide

GENE MILLER

Is the call for political amalgamation of CRD municipalities, at its core, motivated by toxic social impulses?

Nature, the saying goes, abhors a vacuum, as true in the social environment as in the physical world. If a society or a community retreats from one set of priorities or practices—that is, diminishes its moral, regulatory, or energetic investment—some other expression will expand and intensify its influence.

You can witness this truth at play, along with immediate disruptive consequences and worse to come, south of our border. A devastating and depressing early-February piece by *New York Times* columnist Charles Blow makes the point that American institutions, democratic process, and public culture will never be the same, even after Trump is gone.

Happily, hopefully, American political culture and many of its social resonances stop at the border; but more to the point, the times they are a-churning and ideological slugfests are sprouting everywhere. Ideology, as you know, is an idea of how the future should happen.

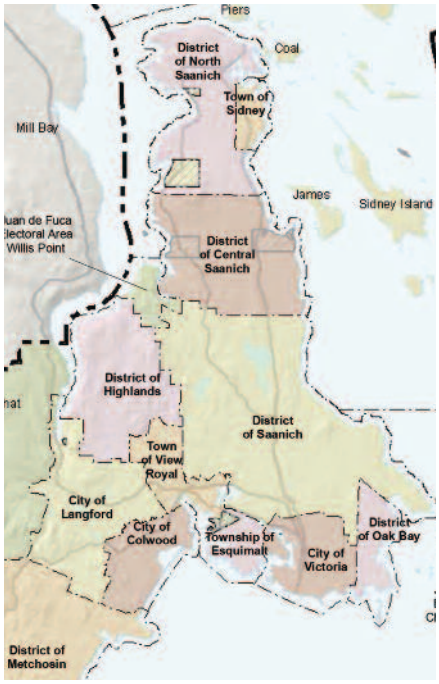
Gosh, does "everywhere" include little old "here?"

The regional amalgamation drum has been beating louder recently, which may indicate that local government and/or community itself is, in word and deed, creating a vacuum, vacating the strong case for localism, allowing it to languish and lose ground.

To be clear: when I write "amalgamation," I am not discussing whether sewer pipes line up at municipal borders. My sole concern (and worry) is political amalgamation: one big Victoria.

In my view, this is amalgamation's central and not-so-subtle social threat: it leads by seemingly logical and harmless increments toward a political inevitability in which citizens willingly, or at least un-protestingly, exchange the more transparent and easily understood triumphs and bloopers of local political process, the accessibility and chances of engagement, for the moonless bureaucratic night and monolithic impenetrability of regional governance. Why add more geographic abstraction to the political process? Why sacrifice precious social identity and political self-expression?

Maybe we're sliding into undifferentiated times (I blame the Internet), and the idea of community-scale selfhood is waning. I'm



posing the idea that an entire glossary of social practice, and the ideas and values behind it, is at risk of fading: community, neighbour, access, participation, engagement, locality, citizenship, mutuality and so on. We're all becoming…the future.

In other words, regional amalgamation, putting aside its ambiguous claims of service efficiency or its glib economic promises, is loaded with hidden social semiotics, and grounded in *values*, not *value*.

Along with other forced political consolidations, amalgamation has its roots sunk in beliefs and power rituals in which a human group, invoking some higher authority (everything from Amalgamation to National Destiny to God) "solves" itself by "solving" the world (and sometimes rooting out the last nonbeliever). People look lazily to, or for, a "higher" power for justification, or solution. It seems built into our genes.

Consider our hypnotic attraction to permission and to the authoritarian potency of "Yes" and "No," how the entitlement to invoke these words and make them law is the key to the imperial capture of the world. We say "mayor," "premier" or "prime minister;" we mean "Your Majesty" or "Daddy" or "Mommy." Secretly, we long to be led and completed by a stronger force; yes, it might dominate us, but it also satisfies something in us—makes ambiguity tolerable, maybe—and performs some perverse and murky release. Pankaj Mishra, in *Age of Anger*, quotes Hugo von Hofmannsthal who, more than a century ago, noted: "Politics is magic. He who knows how to summon the forces from the deep, him they will follow." All of which speaks to this caution: the border between a democracy and an autocracy (or worse) is skin thin. Just cast your eyes south.

In the same way that many physical pathologies flourish when the body system is weak, amalgamation blooms in the body politic when simple community—commonwealth—falters or fails.

Like many such -ations and -isms with hard-to-spot implications and unforeseen consequences, amalgamation can be reasonably argued; but you can't miss the strong flashes of ideology shining through the seams. By ideology I mean *weltanschauung*—worldview and attitude—an idea of what people are, and of human nature and purpose.

How else to explain the repudiation of Lilliputian local government? Please, tune your ear to the critical notes embedded in words like "local," "municipal," "civic," just as "rustic" suggests not "pastoral" alone, but also "clodhopper" and "yokel."

But, now consider how in our everyday lives we occupy an almost exclusively local world whose canvas is painted with life's minute victories, draws and defeats framed by daily routine. Are locals too…local? Is community-scale too idiomatic, too subjective, too weak? Have the times and trends gutted local scale, made it quaint, so that now we accede without resistance to larger, more authoritative and powerful structures?

Come downstairs with me to meet the Devil. Beneath the vegetative repetition and triviality of the everyday is the *fortissimo*: the allure and the appeal of a life vitalized by appetite, ambition, a limitless hunger for reach, self-inflation, fantasies of sexual triumph and hero-hood, a belief in shortcuts and personal exception, hallucinatory images of everything delivered (plenty without a price tag), situational morality (one's own rules and justifications), the debasement—the

CITIES OPEN THE DOOR TO TOXIC SOCIAL IMPULSES and turn into characterless geographies when they lose the skills of, or forget to practice, identity—their culture and history.

dehumanization, really—of other people's identities and needs. In that state of crescendo and self-seduction we become aristocrats crowned by our murky choices, lit by spotlights in our own hall of fame.

Power, dizzying power! But never without a risk or a price tag: the catastrophic collapse of social bonds.

Does political amalgamation, then, unwittingly embody a dangerous pathology, and should its prospects be aggressively countered? No; but be mindful of messaging that promotes the consolidation of healthy, local political publics—you—into one homogenous regional administrative populace.

If you take everything you've read so far to be hysterical amplification, you may have missed that there's a dangerous, narcissistic, emotionally unstable autocrat next door in the White House, and that the Nazi swastika is back in fashion globally, courtesy of quickly rematerializing neo-nationalist/neo-fascist movements now blooming like early crocuses in various places. Poland's new government has just produced a law prohibiting accusations of Polish participation in the Holocaust and other war crimes that took place during the German occupation of Poland. If you're planning to change the future, the first thing you do is write out a contradictory or annoying past.

The worst mistake any of us can make right now is to see historical discontinuity growing all around and, thinking it won't touch us, develop no mental poise and no plan.

So, here's a cautionary thought for our postmodern era, as an ominous and angry near-future assembles the next triple-whammy: a task of local government, expressed through all of its practices and policies, is the renewal and re-expression of commonwealth—that is, the political culture of community and social connection, of shared effort and common goals. "Common" has to be constantly recalibrated, re-communicated, re-learned and re-actualized in our socially abstracted and bemused times. The slide into authoritarianism, *Atlantic Monthly* commentator David Frum warned recently, "is unstoppable if people retreat into private life." In *The Authoritarian Dynamic*, Karen Stenner states: "democracy does not produce community, it *requires* community."

In our fluid age, it takes both a geographic and a social border to sustain city or community identity: a sense of shared purpose reinforced by familiar community structures and protocols, carefully managed physical change and limits on discontinuity, and a rich diet of innovative social projects—an "us," really, not to make people tribal and defensive, but to give identity and energy to these things and help citizens resist the sickness of un-belonging.

Municipalities appear challenged to understand that there's an absolute requirement for amenity-rich communities—locales filled with appealing physical features and social activities and opportunities that people can love and care about—if folks are going to feel engaged and connected, and behave like stakeholders, citizens.

Cities open the door to toxic social impulses and turn into characterless geographies when they lose the skills of, or forget to practice, identity—their culture and history. They unlearn or "busy away" their meaning and run out of story and moral purpose (or mistake a buoyant real estate market for meaning, purpose and validation—a guaranteed sign of cultural degeneration). They run out of Why, and they are not aided if their civic and social leadership is blind to signs, unable to read social and historical metaphor and, consequently, poorly equipped to secure the future.

In modern circumstances, any small city exists under the threat of "historical contingency that sooner or later loses its relevance," to borrow economic geographer Paul Krugman's phrase. Victoria, barely "a little bit of Olde England" or any other defining identity beyond the visitor's "nice" or "cute" anymore, is presently a drifting place, a human geography in search of a new or updated story.

Political amalgamation, I assure you, is not a new narrative and will deliver not a renewed, heartfelt social landscape, but a chartless, implosive cultural ruin.

Gene Miller is currently promoting ASH, an affordable housing concept and, with partner Rob Abbott, is writing the book *Futuretense: Robotics, AI and Life in a Jobless World*.

STRUGGLING WITH LIFE?

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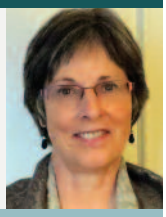

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Looking at the tiny things

MALEEA ACKER

Mary Haig-Brown wants us to see vital connections in the natural world.

In Victoria's rich world of conservation stewards, whether talking with mycologists, fish hatchery volunteers or amphibian counters, one name keeps coming up. Mary Haig-Brown is a bright-eyed optimist who lives in the Prospect Lake region of Saanich. The daughter of renowned writer, naturalist and outdoorsman Roderick Haig-Brown, she grew up in Campbell River alongside its rivers, learning about local ecosystems from an early age. Her optimism about the future of the natural world and the region's local ecosystems may be her most inspiring trait.

I've recently started teaching a workshop at the University of Victoria to help students deal with the impacts of environmental despair. After a semester of introductory geography lectures, many of them are left feeling hopeless; their potential to help the Earth survive the Anthropocene seems miniscule in the face of multinational mining and oil companies, falling biodiversity, or the innumerable pieces of plastic added to the world's oceans each year. "It's too late," they tell me; "we're inheriting a disaster."

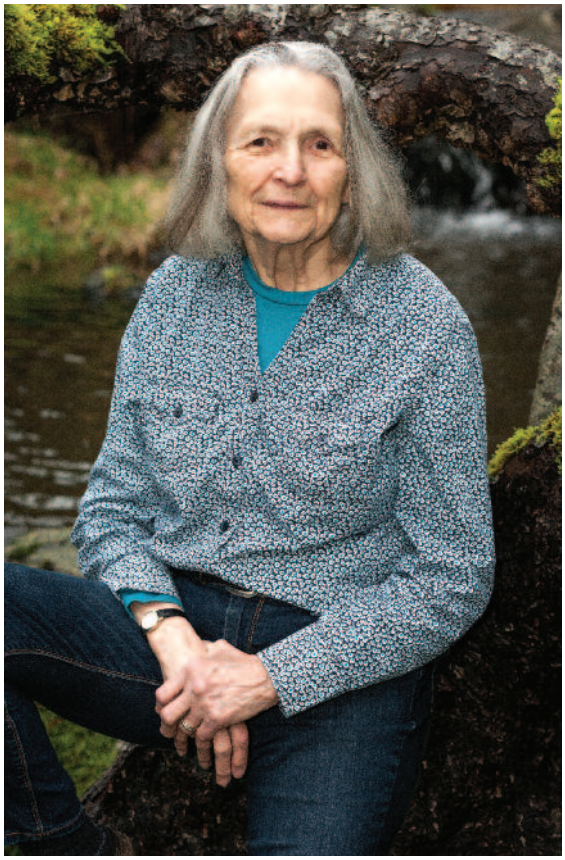


PHOTO: TONY BOUNSALL

Mary Haig-Brown

When I share my students' views with Haig-Brown, she replies without missing a beat: "Nonsense!" There is warmth and stubbornness in her eyes. For Haig-Brown, the knowledge people have about the natural world has done nothing but improve since her childhood up Island. "My father was a lone voice in the wilderness. Now there are so many people looking after the land and the rivers."

Haig-Brown serves as chair of the Friends of Tod Creek Watershed Society (FTCW), where she helps steward the 23 kilometres of watercourses, wetlands, ponds and lakes that stretch across Saanich (as well as parts of the Highlands and Central Saanich), from the heights of Maltby and Killarney Lakes to Tod Creek's flow into Saanich Inlet. The society, which has 43 members, logs over 400 volunteer hours a year. Through the FTCW, Haig-Brown has worked to restore the ecosystem of Whitehead Park on the north end of Prospect Lake. "I taught my family to swim there," she tells me from her home on the banks of Killarney Creek. Killarney supplies 50 percent of the water that enters Prospect Lake.

Her home, lit with skylights and warmed by a woodstove, is a warren of books and comfortable chairs. From the living room windows, which hang out over the trout pond that connects the creek, all one can see is water and the dark cedars opposite. Two of her four children live as her and her husband's neighbours. Haig-Brown also volunteers on the Board of the Peninsula Streams Society, and with Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT). For the latter, she counts bats that fly from their nests under the soffits of her roof in the summer—she just lies down outside her house. In recent years, the count has surpassed 400. "We still don't know where they go when winter comes," she laughs.

Haig-Brown has also collaborated, through FTCW, with Saanich's "Pulling Together" program that sees volunteers remove invasive species from local parks (readers can also get involved through Saanich.ca), and worked with the SeaChange Society on advocating for the fish fence in Gowlland Tod Park (SNITE).

But right now, she's most excited about the Tod Creek Flats, a swath of land owned by four separate land owners, which stretches behind West Saanich Road's Red Barn Market. Originally a peat bog used by First Nations to harvest food, European colonial farmers drained the bog and used it for agriculture; the sisters of St Anne's grew vegetables there for over 50 years, which they supplied to both St Joseph's Hospital and St Anne's Academy. Over the years, the peat levels dropped, due to oxidation and erosion, shortening the growing season to less than 100 days.

Thinking of watersheds as a whole, rather than by their parts (streams, lakes, ponds, wetlands) can help acknowledge the interconnectedness of action in a region. Cutthroat trout that use the fish ladder in Tod Creek can't survive unless they have a quiet stream or pond like Haig-Brown's where they can rear. Cutthroat are a blue-listed species in BC, considered vulnerable, with many of their runs extinct or in decline. Non-native species like Himalayan blackberry and golden willow can clog stream habitats and increase sedimentation and water temperature. Predators can disturb spawning grounds, and culverts prevent trout migration. Tree cutting adjacent to creeks spurs erosion. Haig-Brown has worked to remove golden willow from Killarney Creek that she says exists in an invasive line from Prospect Lake "all the way up to Cowichan," somewhat like the Japanese knotweed now appearing in frightening clumps along the Cowichan and Quamichan Rivers.

Recent support by the Peninsula Streams Society and many volunteers has resulted in construction of channels and a berm next to Tod Creek, allowing cutthroat trout (some perhaps from Haig-Brown's pond) to access the flats for winter habitat and return, as water levels drop in spring, to the creek. Now, Haig-Brown tells me, having managed to get all four current land owners together to support restoration of the area, "they are interested in either doing farming without pesticides

> "MY FATHER WAS A LONE VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS. Now there are so many people looking after the land and the rivers." —*Mary Haig-Brown*

or letting it go back to wetland." Either would be fine with Haig-Brown and the FTCW. Imagine, she says, supplying Red Barn Market with vegetables by wheelbarrow rather than by truck.

Haig-Brown moved to the Prospect Lake area over 40 years ago. Visiting her home feels like stepping back in time, her rural road fortressed by Douglas-fir and rushing waters. But she's seen tremendous changes during her tenure, including recent subdivisions and clearing of upland areas that turned a seasonal stream in her yard into a flooding gully. "I'd like to see everyone knowing the value of the natural areas, of every piece of ground," she says.

Haig-Brown calls Saanich a "shining beacon" of environmental awareness. That is, unless one brings up the topic of the municipality's recently rescinded Environmental Development Permit Area (EDPA) bylaw. Haig-Brown serves on the Saanich Environmental Advisory Committee, which helped to shape the current bylaw, and which sought to fold in previous iterations of wildlife, tree, and sensitive ecosystem protection into the EDPA bylaw. Now that it has been rescinded, these protections are in jeopardy. [See Briony Penn's article in this edition for more on Saanich's EDPA.]

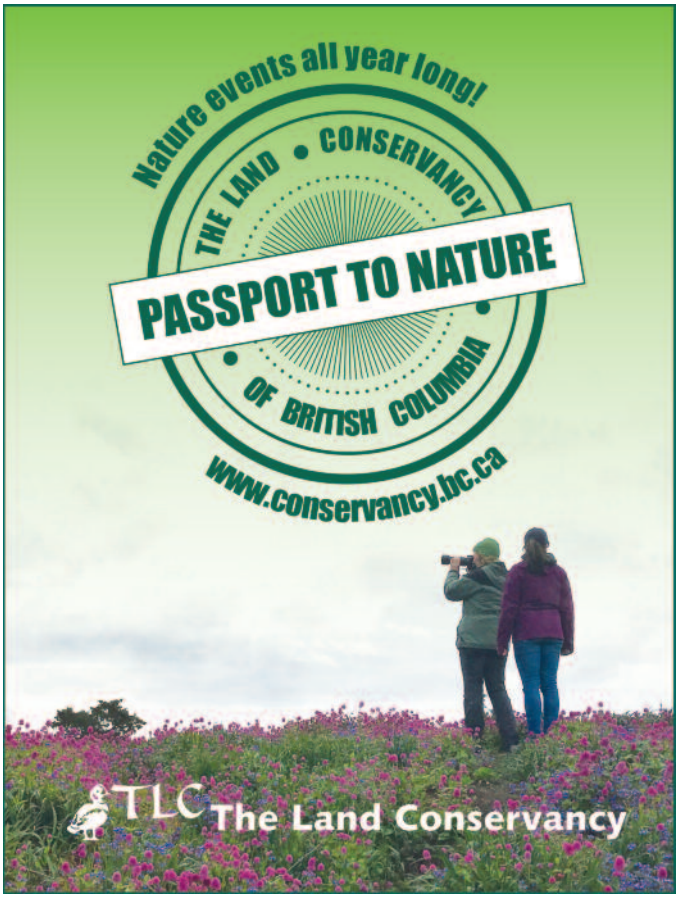
People often don't realize, she says, that the actions they take on their own land can reverberate and affect adjacent properties and parks. She invited Saanich's Mayor Atwell out to view the damage Whitehead Park has sustained from flooding. Water which used to be locked into the groundwater system now flows off four adjacent properties where owners removed a number of trees. The tree removal caused erosion and flooding. Though she had warned the mayor, he didn't bring his rubber boots. "I don't think he understood," she tells me, ruefully. It's the only time during our conversation I see her hopefulness falter.

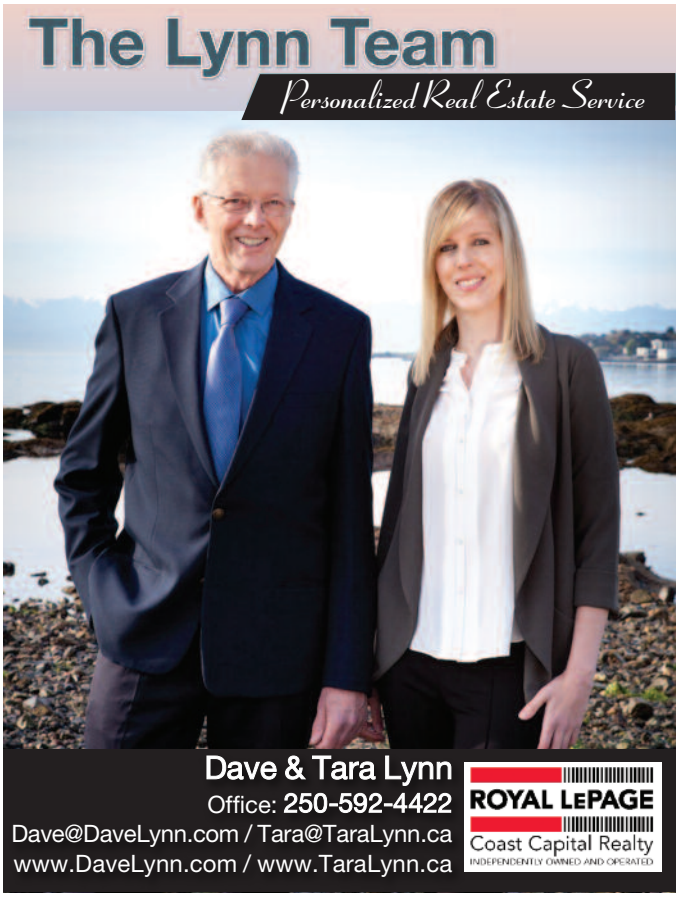
The answer, she argues, is learning how to encourage water to stay where it falls. "We've lost 85-90 percent of our wetlands," she says. People don't want to be told what to do, she acknowledges, but the more we learn—through volunteering or caretaking one's own land—the more that knowledge helps bind us to our ecosystems. "If you can do something, then do it," she argues. "You can't get [involved] without wondering: 'Why did it grow that way? What comes here at night? What's going on underground?'"

The life she lives is one she's embraced since her earliest days, hanging around with her siblings as her mother did the farm chores. "When my mother was milking the cow, and we were running around behind the barn, she'd say to us, 'Go tell me what's growing back there.' We'd find yellow violets, other wildflowers. She taught me to look at the tiny things."

It's a technique that's helping to save the region's wild places, one volunteer hour at a time.

Maleea Acker is the author of *Gardens Aflame: Garry Oak Meadows of BC's South Coast* (New Star, 2012). She is currently completing a PhD in Human Geography, focusing on the intersections between the social sciences and poetry.





We deserve everything we're going to get

TRUDY DUIVENVOORDEN MITIC

Site C will help power up cannabis hot houses, Bitcoin mining, and LNG!

I reluctantly interrupt my originally-planned column to bring you an unwelcome realization which, like a Poe raven, has just landed heavily inside my head. Now I'm thinking that maybe we're going to need the Site C Dam after all.

This leaves me anguished, given all the dam-slamming I've done from the top of a considerable heap of dam-damning evidence. Everything about the project's backstory has become the stuff of infamy, from the billions of dollars originally committed without prior (or any) due diligence, to the planned flooding of thousands of hectares of other peoples' land and homes. Don't forget the destruction of ecosystems, trampling of treaties, and waving away of myriad concerns—including the open-ended price tag, and the god-knows-how-high electricity rates that are sure to follow. Would I buy anything under similar terms? I would not.

You already know how the saga unfolds. The Liberals roared into hard-hat gear, bent on getting Site C beyond the point of no return before the NDP assumed office. It was a job well done, because by then they'd spent four billion dollars rearranging the Peace River Valley into a newly-found land of big winners and losers.

Then Premier Horgan, still weighted down by the slag of his previous anti-Site-C stance, sputtered a contrite, newfound awareness that he couldn't kill the project now—not with the billions already spent, and the workers all desperately needing a reason to continue packing their lunch kits every day. (At least Horgan seemed genuinely conflicted, unlike our prime minister's Kafkaesque approval of the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain expansion, a paternalistic oration that remains unrivalled in the whiplash category of *If A, then B—Say Whaaat?*)

But steering away from political perplexity, here are three new reasons why we probably need Site C after all. First, the energy-addicted LNG portfolio appears to be worming its way back onto the table. Few details are available as I write, but one thing is certain: In BC you can never, ever, say for certain that a pet political project is dead. Don't fall for all that suave assurance. The Northern Gateway Dragon, for example, has not been slayed. It is just resting.

The second reason is cannabis. Again, it's early days, but clearly Big Business has caught its lucrative drift. Cannabis grows well almost anywhere, but we nonetheless are going to encase it—in untold acres of greenhouses, planted on our best arable land. Greenhouses are energy hogs, and that's just the beginning. No worries for us though, not with Site C powering us through the brown-outs. (Although, with Business typically galloping out front, and Policy struggling in vain to keep up, do stay braced for inevitable *Oopsie* moments.)

And then there's Bitcoin. Who could have predicted this: legions of computers all over the world, churning away on algorithms that "mine" for icons hidden deep beneath the pretend-world surface? At one time, Bitcoin was touted as a new digital currency, but now it operates more like a lottery system, where your computer picks the numbers that could lead you to the motherlode. Kind of like souped-up Keno, although that now seems infantile by comparison.

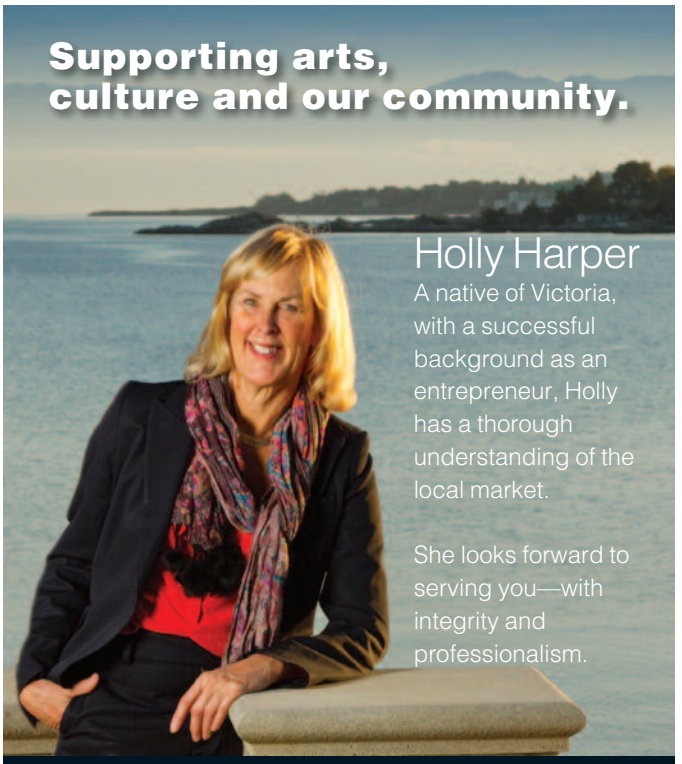
As with all speculative activity, Bitcoin is serious business. People worldwide are using their savings to fill warehouses with stacks of beefed-up computers—or "mining machines," as they're called in the biz—that operate around the clock like so many miniature pump-jacks on steroids. Picture all this. If Bitcoin was happening on another planet, we'd be making fun of its citizens.

But smirks and quizzical head-scratching aside, Bitcoin's increasingly heavy drain on the real-world grid is probably the more imminent concern. According to the web-based publication *Digiconomist,* a single Bitcoin transaction draws as much energy as 300,000 Visa transactions. Or, using an estimate in *Scientific American,* the same amount of energy to boil around 36,000 kettles filled with water. Analysis by the web-based publication *Motherboard* projects that Bitcoin's global network could be using as much electricity as Denmark by 2020. One thing is certain: Right now, Bitcoin's exponential growth shows no sign of stopping.

No worries for us though, not with Site C. In this province of plenty, this veritable Eden, it's part of the grand SuperNatural smorgasbord that can feed all of our cravings. There's no need to curtail or tread lightly. No need to change habits or thinking.

After all, aren't we humans the chosen ones, the long-ago recipients of the keys to the Earth? We deserve everything we want. We deserve everything we're going to get.

Trudy holds out hope that we'll soon arrive at solutions and find the wherewithal to begin embracing them.



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