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ON THE COVER
“Camouflage” by Desiree Bond, 19 x 13 inches, mixed media on
paper. An exhibition of Bond’s paintings runs October 3 to
November 12 at Eclectic Gallery,
2170 Oak Bay Avenue. There’s a
reception October 6, 7-9pm.
Congratulations are in order: To the men and women of all persuasions and ages who made it crystal clear that they didn’t want any development near the Juan de Fuca Marine Trail. It involved a lot of work, conflict and anxiety since 2008, but the public got what they wanted.

It wasn’t easy, though. As Gordon O’Connor of the Dogwood Initiative writes: “When Ender Ilkay first presented his proposal for the Juan de Fuca trail we were staring down some blindingly complicated and self-contradictory legislation, a biased voting structure, well-resourced opponents and a political system that discourages public involvement.”

Zoe Blunt of the Forest Action Network credits the visibility of people’s unity and strength of commitment for winning the day: “I don’t think it was just sweet reason!” She feels the politicians realized they might have another Clayoquot on their hands if they dared approve Ilkay’s plans for a resort involving 257 cabins.

Besides citizen involvement, Blunt says the tide turned when other environmental and community organizations got on board: the Dogwood Initiative, the Wilderness Committee, Protect Our Parks, Sierra Club, Sea to Sea Greenbelt Society, Jordan River Community Association, and Jordan River Steering Committee.

CRD officials could envision thousands of protesters in the woods if they didn’t bow to the expressed public interest. And there was also the threat of a legal challenge—Forest Action Network “made it clear we’d be challenging the bylaw [in court] if passed—and that we’d be successful,” says Blunt. On this score they had help from lawyers and West Coast Environmental Law.

Of the long battle, Blunt says: “It needn’t have gone on as long as it did—96-99 percent of the people were opposed to it. We tried to tell [members of the Juan de Fuca Electoral Area Land Use Committee] that—we did tell them that. We had surveys and so on. It meant nothing until they had their noses rubbed in it at the public hearing. They had to have a three-day public hearing before they were convinced. I wish we hadn’t had to do it—it was a strain on all our resources.” As just one example of those resources: at least $30,000 was spent by the Land Use Committee on preparing the bylaw agreement.

But, while the process may have been complicated, acrimonious and expensive—at least there was a process—one that did entitle citizens to public hearings and allowed them to address the CRD board regularly.

Unfortunately, the provincial government has no similar allowances for public involvement. This is what’s getting them into difficulty now with smart meters and before that with the HST. Most relevant...
to the issue at hand is their release of 28,000 hectares of Western Forest Products land from Tree Farm License status in 2007. BC’s own Auditor General pointed out the government’s move amounted to a significant gift to the corporation without any regard for public interest.

As Zoe Blunt says, not only was there no consultation, but “Western Forest Products profited off of having those lands in the Tree Farm License area for 50 years, and that they could just take their chips and cash out leaving the whole province in the lurch wasn’t right. There should be something offered back to the community.” Blunt is blunt—and correct: “The province failed us.”

But rather than making amends, the Liberal government is making excuses. It’s not a lot of money—likely around $5 million to purchase the land from Ilkay. When you think of (a) what’s at stake, (b) their culpability for the whole mess, and (c) their overall budget ($40 billion), five large ones should be doable.

Yet local MLA and Sport and Cultural Development Minister Ida Chong is still refusing to champion her constituents’ desires. When interviewed by news media, she asked: “Why was this not told to me two years ago when I could have put the whole thing in the mix?” referring to $2 million the province contributed to purchasing land around Sandcut and Jordan River.

Blunt describes her response as both ridiculous and disingenuous: “The instant those lands were released, people were demanding to know why there was no contribution, no compensation to the people of British Columbia. So she can’t throw up her hands and say ‘Oh, I had no idea that’s what people wanted.’”

CRD Board Chair Geoff Young noted in a letter to the province: “Release of the Tree Farm License lands in 2007 created an unprecedented situation for the CRD and for planning in the JDF Rural Resource area. The fallout from this decision could be partially mitigated by preserving the Marine Trail Holdings lands as parkland, which would prevent resource extraction in an area bordering the park. This is something that the CRD does not have the ability to achieve.”

Chong has said the request won’t be considered until March. But Ilkay is threatening to log—current zoning allows this and other resource extraction or very low density housing (seven homes on the entire 236-hectare property).

Blunt thinks that if the province refuses to buy Ilkay’s land and add it to the park, another “win-win-win solution” would be a swap whereby Ilkay would get a parcel with preferential zoning in a settlement area.

Going forward, O’Connor, Blunt and many now-more-politically-aware citizens are determined to see the Regional Growth Strategy have more teeth and the CRD board operate in a more sensible manner. As a letter at the Sierra Club website states: “The protracted and exhausting process that resulted in the ultimate rejection of the development proposal...has also shown that the voting structure of the Capital Regional District is no longer adequate. It needs to be updated to give our elected representatives from all municipalities and electoral areas—the whole CRD Board—a voice in matters that affect the whole region.”

The upcoming civic elections will likely see a shake-up at the CRD. Blunt reports, for instance, that “a very well known, well respected green” is about to launch a campaign to unseat Juan de Fuca electoral area director Mike Hicks.

Controversial development proposals are pretty much guaranteed to arise again given that a full two-thirds of the CRD lies in the Juan de Fuca district, much of it made available by the provincial government’s largesse to WFP. Let’s hope the CRD gets its act together and the Liberals show a little generosity towards the people who went all out to fight for the land they love.

Leslie Campbell loves the fact that Victoria has wilderness so close to the city.
Re: Proposed LRT rings warning bells, September 2011

Leslie Campbell brings up a lot of valid points in her LRT article. The web of connections between SNC/Lavalin and BC Transit makes you scratch your head, and Lavalin needs to be way more forthcoming about its astronomical cost estimate. We can just send ‘em packing if you scratch your head, and Lavalin needs to be way more forthcoming about the service life of the new bridge.

One has to wonder why the politicians are building a three-lane bridge to replace an existing three-lane bridge, when vehicle count is guaranteed to increase significantly over the next several decades? The CRD is already projecting that there will be a 200 percent increase in traffic congestion by 2026.

This bridge is not increasing capacity one iota, while other bridges recently built or under construction are doubling and tripling capacity around the province.

So not to worry, Mr Broadland. Future politicians will be crying for yet another crossing within 25 or 30 years, well within the range of the service life of the new bridge.

No doubt they will be cursing the current politicians for their shortsightedness.

Rodger Darbey

Re: Getting a read on smart meters, September 2011

Rob Wipond characterizes my response to the IARC classification of radio frequency electromagnetic fields as 2B “possible human carcinogens” as “dismissive” and “more like public relations than science.” I regret that my stance would be interpreted in this fashion. The IARC classification has caused many people much concern, and my web posting was an attempt to put the thinking and evidence behind the IARC process into perspective.

It is important that your readers know that the 2B classification was based on “limited evidence of carcinogenicity” and that “chance, bias, or confounding could not be ruled out with reasonable confidence” for the few positive associations reported in the literature. Nor was the ruling by the committee unanimous.

The IARC press release is fairly explicit in stating that the ruling was “based on a reported increased risk for glioma, a malignant type of brain cancer associated with wireless cellphone use.” Furthermore this increase was only noted in the highest decile of reported use. The only published report from the IARC yet available (The Lancet “Oncology” vol 12, issue 7, p624-626) is more explicit in stating that the findings are susceptible to recall bias and participant selection bias—and that this could not be ruled out, and therefore that a causal association is possible.

In reviewing other studies of occupational or population exposures for other cancers, the IARC found that “the available evidence was insufficient for any conclusion.”

The working group also noted that up until now, reported rates of glioma incidence in populations have not shown any parallel increase in the rates of increased cellphone use.

This is equally true for BC.

When looking at the more than 40 animal studies that Mr Wipond accuses me of ignoring, the IARC states “there is limited evidence of carcinogenicity in experimental animals” (six of seven chronic exposure studies showed no increase of any tumour type in tissues or organs in exposed animals; 10 of 12 showed no increase in malignancies in tumour-prone animals).

Similarly the working group reviewed many studies on genotoxicity, immune function, gene and protein expression, cell signalling, oxidative stress and apoptosis (cell death), blood brain barrier and other effects. The working group noted that while there was evidence of an effect of RF-EMF on some of these endpoints, the overall conclusion was that these results provided “only weak mechanistic evidence relevant to RF-EMF induced cancer in humans.”

Given that the statement from the IARC that RF-EMF cannot be ruled out as a human carcinogen, is in effect solely related to some (not

Wally Young
all) epidemiological studies of high and prolonged exposure to cellphones, that selection or recall bias cannot be ruled out, that occupational and animal studies are so far inconsistent and unhelpful, and that experimental evidence looking at putative cellular mechanisms is “weak,” I would argue that an appropriate and prudent response is to monitor the science and not to panic.

Perry Kendall, OBC, MBBS, MSc, FRCPCH
Provincial Health Officer
Ministry of Health

Thank you, Rob Wipond, for an excellent article on smart meters. BC Hydro has been installing these things, beginning August 1 in Victoria, with no debate. I am part of a large and growing provincial group of people who are refusing to allow these dangerous meters to be put on our homes.

Mr Wipond outlines clearly most of our concerns, but additional ones include the fact that each meter contains 1000 mg of pure mercury (more than that in 300 CFL bulbs), which will be banned by the federal government in 2012. Mercury is a biohazard and in 15-20 years, the life span of these meters, 1.0-1.5 metric tonnes will be disposed of, threatening our environment. When fires occur, mercury vaporizes into a deadly bio-toxin. And fires will occur.

One last concern: Corix, the installer, is hiring inexperienced, unqualified persons when electricians should do this job.

We should fight this program with all of our might for many reasons. There is no benefit, and so many problems.

Sharon Noble

Re: Psychedelic revival, September 2011

Dr Maté’s selfless work with Vancouver’s oppressed is unparallelled. But ayahuasca for addictions? Deep end, sorry. And I’m no war-against-drugs puritan. Dr Maté gave it away here: On ayahuasca, “You don’t get to escape your pain—you see your pain. You see what it’s about.” Translation: You see your pain—but don’t feel your pain.

We are a deeply repressed culture, starting with the words we use to indicate our core feelings. Our culture of personal growth is actually based on the continued denial of feelings: we can “talk” about feelings, “understand” feelings, “manage” feelings, “cope” with feelings, “soothe” feelings, “meditate” and “medicate” feelings, “honour” our “inner child,” and now apparently “see” feelings with psychedelics—but never simply feel feelings.

By the time we are adults, we have all sorts of falsely defined labels found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Less than 10 percent of them are genetic. The DSM is basically a glossary for mental professional and pharmaceutical profiteering, but has nothing to do with feeling alive again.

Psychedelics just become one more way to avoid our most repressed feelings: deep grief, tears, non-violent anger or non-blaming rage. Nature doesn’t require us to have any kind of drug for feeling our feelings again. Infants need no drugs to feel deeply. Neither do adults.

We just have to have the courage to feel the feelings with a trusted person. Doesn’t have to be a psychedelic soothsayer, psychiatrist, psychologist, MSW, MFCC, Freudian therapist or the Dalai Lama. Just has to be someone who will sit quietly and attentively with us without interrupting when we start to cry or non-violently rage—someone who has felt their own painful feelings.

No doubt there are some positive healing outcomes on psychedelics—I had one myself. But upon closer examination, these occur despite the drugs’ influence. They happen because people cried and felt years of repressed rage.

John Lennon healed through just such a feeling process. Read “John Lennon Primal Therapy” at www.PrimalTherapy.com. He let go of psychedelics to do it. Romanticizing psychedelics is not the same as reclaiming ourselves through genuinely and deeply felt feelings.

Larry Wartel

Re: Damming evidence, July/August 2011

I am a retired dam engineer from New Zealand, on a visit to Vancouver Island. It was therefore with interest and insight that I read Briony Penn’s article about the Three Gorges Dam, illustrating the sometimes unexpected consequences of building dams. The author expresses the pious (but no doubt futile) hope that the example of the Three Gorges Dam will act as a deterrent to development of the BC Hydro proposal to build a third dam on the Peace River.

Sad to say, the track record of dam owners everywhere suggests that once again, nothing will have been learned, and of course Three Gorges Dam itself was the subject of fierce criticism on an international scale that was ignored. We should not therefore be surprised if the predicted “urgent problems” have in fact come to pass. Nor has it been the only large dam in the not-so-distant past that has had predictable and undesirable consequences. Examples include the Akosombo Dam in Ghana (wrecked the tide water fisheries and related livelihoods through dramatic alteration to the tidal regime arising from reduced river flows); the Clyde Dam in New Zealand (had to be redesigned after the discovery of an active fault at the dam site, plus reservoir slope stability issues); and the Bakun Dam in East Malaysia (already subject to many complaints, including loss of wildlife habitat, prior to impounding having even started). Going back a bit farther, we should not forget the Tarbela and Mangla Dams in Pakistan, and the Dokan Dam in Iraq that flooded many priceless archaeological sites.

The truth seems to be that dam engineers and owners don’t want to know about the side effects, an attitude that was made clear to me the day I delivered a paper to the Canadian Dam Safety Association in Sudbury, Ontario, with the message that it was time for dam engineers to consider the net benefit to society at large of building large dams, and to move away from the ingrained attitude that all dams are necessarily good. I congratulate Ms Penn on her well-thought-out article, but suspect that it will have little effect where it really matters.

Michael Palmer

Correction

In September’s “Is Victoria ready for the Big One?” Two pictures of Christchurch’s earthquake are incorrectly captioned as being in Auckland.
School Board pans its own strategic plan

Rob Wipond

Stantec makes off with the money in what looks like a nation-wide practice of producing copied-and-pasted assessments.

The year-long development of the Greater Victoria School District’s strategic facilities plan may have been an utter waste of time, resources and taxpayer dollars. And now, practically everyone involved is hoping and praying that’s exactly what it was—because the alternative would be much worse.

Either way, the consulting firm Stantec is plucking untold sums from school district coffers through what looks like a BC-wide or even national practice.

“It’s about a billion-dollar corporation that appears to have taken advantage of the good will of a vulnerable school district that’s already stretched to its limits,” summarizes David Bratzer, a Victoria police constable who’s been following school issues and is running for a trustee position this fall.

The bizarre situation began unfolding early last year.

School districts regularly submit five-year “Capital Plans” to the provincial government to access funds for building design, construction, maintenance, renovations and repairs. Last year, the province changed the rules. Starting May, 2011, school districts would be required to have a comprehensive, strategic, longer-term School District Facilities Plan (SDFP), and the SDFP would provide the basis and rationale for all future five-year Capital Plan requests.

That should’ve been big news. With an annual budget approaching $200 million, GVSD is one of this region’s largest employers and land and building owners, and its decisions have enormous impacts on neighbourhoods. Some school districts, like Saanich’s, have created committees with diverse stakeholders to lead community SDFP consultations. GVSD, however, paid $49,000 to outsource the project to Stantec, a multinational engineering, infrastructure and consulting company.

Apparently, GVSD had other pressing priorities.

“You wouldn’t have to [hire a consultant], if you had somebody free on staff who could do it,” explains GVSD board chair Tom Ferris.

Few even knew about the decision.

“It represents the privatization of strategic planning within our public school district. I’m strongly opposed to that,” says Bratzer. But he didn’t hear about the plan until it was nearly finished. “It slid under the radar for almost everybody.”

The Greater Victoria Teachers’ Association was consulted once. “I’m not sure that it was anything more than the ability for them to write in their report that we’d been consulted,” says president Tara Ehrcke. “I don’t think anything that we said got responded to or incorporated.”

How little public involvement was there? “I was not consulted in the development of this plan,” states Catherine Alpha—and she’s an elected trustee on the GVSD board overseeing the project.

In late April of this year, Stantec announced its only public meeting for May 10th. None of the 30-some people who attended, including GVSD staff and trustees, were even shown a draft copy of the plan, and less than an hour of questioning occurred. A month later, Stantec submitted the final plan.

At the June board meeting before summer break, GVSD trustees were reeling with disappointment, frustration and anxiety.

Ferris commented to general assent that, in terms of the factual information, “I don’t think there’s anything in that report that we don’t already know.” Bev Horsman described Stantec’s recommendations as “inflammatory,” and called for deleting them.

Dave Pitre said he was “alarmed” that the BC government might already have a copy of the now-public plan and expect GVSD to conform to it in future.

The trustees’ complaints? Here’s just a few: Stantec had used policy concepts this district never uses and proposed extremely controversial school closings and consolidations. They hadn’t balanced facilities issues with educational concerns, like the value of multipurpose rooms for special-needs students. They’d attached no importance to heritage sites. They’d stopped their projections around 2020-25, precisely when cyclical birthrates should be boosting enrolments again. And trustees were stunned Stantec (apparently obliviously) had actually recommended violating the BC School Act in restricting enrolments.

Michael McEvoy was particularly bemused by discords between what the Victoria statistics actually showed, versus what the plan recommended.

Copy-and-paste consulting: pages from Stantec’s “Strategic Facilities Plan” for Greater Victoria School District (l) and Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools.
"Contrary to the conclusions that were drawn in the report," he said, "(the numbers) didn’t speak to me in any way about school closures."

Peg Orcherton and Alpha asked if payment could be withheld until Stantec did more research and analysis. Administrators hastily quashed that, supported by trustee Elaine Leonard.

“They’ve fulfilled the [Request for Proposals],” said Leonard. “We’re obliged to pay them.”

Her assertion was questioned, but the discussion then turned to reassuring the public this plan didn’t reflect actual board plans.

All of which raised the question: How did a crucial, provincially-mandated long-term strategic plan, contracted by the GVSD board, come to in no way reflect the views of the board?

After a summer fending off spreading public anxiety, trustees don’t have the same recollections about what they’d even hired Stantec to do.

“I just assumed the agenda was to have a [facility] audit,” says Horsman. “[Stantec] had no business making recommendations that involved dramatic changes to the way schooling would happen in Victoria.”

Alpha and Orcherton concur, adding that they expect any true strategic plan to involve the board and community. They’re worried the Ministry of Education may hold them to Stantec’s plan if they don’t create another one.

Conversely, Leonard says she’d wanted “outside” perspectives.

“I take it as one of the tools in our toolbox that we use to come up with our [five-year] facilities plan,” she says. “That’s my understanding of it and that’s how I understood it all the way along.”

Ferris similarly feels the province’s directive has been satisfactorily met and it’s time to move on.

So as far as he’s concerned, the Stantec plan is our new SDFP?

“Yep,” Ferris answers.

Ferris isn’t worried, though, about how thoroughly this SDFP contradicts the board’s actual perspectives or plans.

“You have to bear in mind, this is not a document which binds anybody to anything. It provides information,” he says. “It isn’t terrifically important.”
So why would the provincial government mandate it?

“I’m not exactly sure,” Ferris says. “That would be a good question; you’d have to go to the province about that. I suppose you could ask if it was worth doing.”

I contacted the Ministry of Education (more on that in a moment). But even reading GVSD’s own Request for Proposals, it seems all the trustees may be inventively evading their responsibility for the fiasco.

Their RFP reads, “The Board of Education... wishes to retain a consultant to prepare a comprehensive Strategic Facilities Plan... that provides rationale for specific capital projects that may be proposed as part of the School District’s five year capital plan.”

Clearly, the trustees were seeking a consultant to develop a comprehensive Strategic Facilities Plan to guide the board’s future decisions under the province’s new rules. Not someone to just prepare a background report, outside perspective, unimportant gobbledygook, or building audit without recommendations. Indeed, the RFP they all approved lists 13 detailed objectives, including for the consultant to “recommend changes” in a wide range of vital areas such as policies and planning principles, accommodating special needs, consolidation and replacement of schools, and possible alternate uses of schools by outside agencies. (Notably, the proponent was also required to “provide interim reports to the Board of School Trustees.”)

As far as the SDFP’s importance goes: Though the plan needn’t be formally submitted, the province’s directive states that, “A comprehensive SDFP must form the basis for a board of education’s capital investment decisions.” And its new application form for facilities funding states all requests “must” have already been established in the SDFP and be supported through rationales “as outlined in the SDFP.” How this might be enforced remains unclear, but in an email, a Ministry of Education spokesperson stated, “The Ministry would not expect to receive a capital project request that could not be supported by a district’s SDFP, nor would the Ministry expect a Board to prioritize a request outside of its SDFP.”

“[The trustees] need to start the whole thing over from scratch,” says Bratzer. “It’s unfortunate that it’s come to this.”

And even if the province inexplicably doesn’t enforce its own directive, he’d like GVSD to follow School District #63’s lead to forge a better plan while building support for public education.

“If you have an extensive public process to develop a long-term plan for the district, then you provide people with an opportunity to engage and to learn about the issues,” says Bratzer. “I passionately believe we need to get the entire community involved. But [this school board] hasn’t shown a willingness to do that.”

Meanwhile, Bratzer won’t let Stantec off the hook, either. In the media and a presentation to the board, he criticized the plan’s “simplistic and repetitive” advice, and pointed to seven sections which were copied, without proper attribution, from government and other websites.

“Somebody reading this plan has no way of determining what recommendations are genuine recommendations that have come from a professional consulting firm as opposed to text that has simply been copied from a Ministry of Education website,” he comments.

Ferris dismissed it as common practice for consultants, and Orcherton criticized it as “sloppiness,” but either way, Bratzer’s pleas to protect the school district’s “academic integrity” by shredding the plan, withholding payment, and giving Stantec “an F for plagiarism” have been largely ignored.

Even though he’s used to following orders on duty, as a private citizen, Bratzer is equally accustomed to, in his words, “speaking truth to power” in the face of controversy. He’s a board member of Law Enforcement Against Prohibition (which advocates harm-reduction drug laws), and criticized “tough on crime” legislation to a federal Senate Committee. This September, Bratzer was still doggedly distributing his binder of materials censuring the Stantec report.

I decided to investigate further. And I soon discovered there’s an obvious reason why Stantec’s plan doesn’t reflect our community or GVSD policies, values, goals or statistics: Much of it was written for another school district. It appears that copying and pasting together all-purpose worded school district strategic plans has become a multi-million dollar business for Stantec.

For example, Chapter 4 in Stantec’s Victoria plan, “Vision and Strategic Facilities Planning Principles,” begins, “The demographics of the District have changed significantly over the past several years, with some schools increasing in enrolment and some schools decreasing in enrolment. This has resulted in some schools being overcrowded and some schools being underutilized.” If that sounds like something that could apply to any school district without even looking, that’s because that’s exactly how it’s being used. That paragraph and about 99 percent of the text on the following five pages have been copied in toto from Stantec’s March 2010 Delta School District long-term plan.

Similarly, about 80 percent of the Victoria plan’s Chapter 5, “Options and Evaluations” and Chapter 6, “Summary and Recommendations” are also copied from Delta’s plan and other sources.

Victoria’s plan also includes 90 pages of enrollment charts and school zone maps—but the data for these came from our own school board (“There was no new information within the report,” confirms GVSD superintendent John Gaiptman.)

So in the end, only a tiny percentage of Stantec’s 120-page strategic plan for our school district seems to be original, Victoria-relevant material. But even those parts aren’t reliable: Many “locally specific” sections were apparently merely created with an automated search-and-replace action, because odd grammar or capitalization errors are frequently left behind, like “…the current condition of The District schools...” and “Some The District schools have surplus capacity...”

Stantec has recently also produced strategic plans for school districts in Powell River, Abbotsford, Okanagan-Skaha, Chilliwack, Port Alberni and elsewhere. And wherever they’re searchable online, vast swathes of identical or slightly-changed sections can be found. My mind dizzies trying to imagine how this dubious practice can possibly keep working, upon discovering that nearly identical elucidations of “Background,” “Vision,” “Key factors driving the need for the plan,” and “Planning Principles” are now guiding school regions as diverse as Wetaskiwin in rural Alberta, Regina’s Prairie Valley, and Greater Victoria.

And the biggest beneficiary when school districts follow Stantec’s “standard” recommendations may be Stantec itself: Their blog boasts about Stantec’s major design and construction projects underway at Kelset Elementary School in Saanich, Royal Oak Middle School and North Saanich Middle School.

“I’ve been very careful to give the school board and Stantec the benefit of the doubt. But I can’t do that anymore,” comments Bratzer. “It’s time to focus on accountability. And it’s important also for us to rally as a community and begin looking at a genuine long-term plan that is created through community engagement as opposed to by a private corporation.”

Rob Wipond has posted links and references at www.focusonline.ca. Contact rob@robwipond.com.
V
c
till the closet systems are still
the foundation of her business, Janet
is now carrying many organizing “acces-
sories” (watch for a Christmas catalogue
in November). For instance, for kitchens,
she offers four different types of rollout
shelving that allow you to maximize
the usefulness of hard-to-access
cupboards. Utensil organizers, drawer
trays, and stacking shelves are other
simple ways to retrofit your kitchen.

For bathrooms, unique shelving solu-
tions, towel rods, and shower caddies are offered.
And home handymen will be able to keep their garage
or workshop tidy and efficient with All Organized
Storage’s grid boards, shelving and tool storage units.

Other new items include a unique, streamlined
wall-mounted wine rack made of stainless steel.
For inside closets, there are belt and tie racks, clear
stacking show boxes and jewellery inserts. There’s
also a valet stand, the Ovation line of wooden
hangers, and for those with little closet space, a
compact pant trolley on wheels, to mention just a
few of the accessories available.

“With smaller homes and downsizing, as well as
the explosion of consumerism, we need to maximize
the storage capacity of the storage we have,” says
Janet. “Without proper storage you cannot be orga-
nized. I see closets as the foundation of organization.”

That’s why she carries five complete and varied lines
of closet systems—which come in many different
finishes. Over her years in business, Janet has learned
what works best in different situations and how to
blend them to custom-design a closet that works for
individual clients’ needs.

Janet says, “People can come in with their basic
closet measurements and I can provide a ballpark price
on different options.” Later, she will come out and get
detailed measurements.

Some systems need to be professionally installed, but
do-it-yourselfers can install others themselves, including
the European “Elements” and wood slatted systems.

Many of Janet’s clients have started with one room
and quickly become converts, relying on her services
for other projects. Designers and builders often get
Janet involved in outfitting houses they are renovating
or building. Chris Walker of Christopher Developments,
who views All Organized Storage as his closet vendor
of choice, says, “Janet has completed a number of
demanding installations for us. Her attention to detail,
exceptional planning skills and customer service have
been impressive to say the least.”

The mother of two teenagers, Janet Young says,
“I don’t see myself as selling, but serving and problem
solving. I don’t have just one product line, but rather
I offer a large range of products to solve a variety of
storage problems to fit an individual’s style.”

All Organized Storage
3370 Tennyson Avenue (near UpTown)
Showroom hours: Tues–Fri, 10–5; Sat 10–3 pm
250-590-6328
www.AllOrganizedStorage.ca
Calling shenanigans on that

DAVID BROADLAND

Was the early closing of the Johnson Street Railway Bridge staged to divert attention away from a threat to the new bridge project?

Back on April 7 the City of Victoria suddenly announced they were closing the Johnson Street Railway Bridge after Stantec Consulting identified problems with the bridge. The City said repairs to keep it open for rail, pedestrians and cyclists would cost $120,000. Since this amount “greatly exceeded the annual maintenance budget for the bridge,” and because they were going to demolish the rail bridge in “early 2012” anyway, City council accepted their staff’s recommendation not to repair the bridge. Its closure shut off the main access route for cyclists and pedestrians into and out of the city via the Galloping Goose Trail and put the E&N Dayliner out of business.

In our May edition I noted that all the problems found by Stantec had been well documented by Delcan Corp three years previously. In the interim, City engineers had made no attempt to address these issues. Now those same problems had suddenly become “critical.”

At the time of the closure, many people rolled their eyes about the City’s claim that the rail bridge, which days before had successfully supported the weight of the 70-ton Dayliner, was now, literally overnight, unsafe for the weight of a dozen or so cyclists and pedestrians.

In short, the whole thing had the whiff of a phony emergency.

The repairs that Stantec said needed doing were described in a five-page report the City made available to the public. They noted there were two “critical” repairs and two repairs that involved “less serious deterioration.” But the City itself didn’t provide any information on why these simple repairs—which involved welding short lengths of angle iron across deteriorated areas—would cost $120,000. (Stantec provided no cost information.)

On April 7, under provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, Focus asked for the record of the City’s communications with Stantec on this issue. What the City eventually gave us included an email discussion by City staffers that suggested the $120,000 might have been dreamt up by the City’s communications staff.

So in June, Focus filed an FOI for details on the City’s claim the repairs would cost $120,000. In mid-September, with the City either unable or unwilling to provide proof substantiating that $120,000 claim, I took Stantec’s repair specifications to Ken Abrams of Victoria Urban Iron on Store Street and asked him for a quote on the work Stantec said was needed. Abrams has been in the metal fabricating business since 1973. I explained that this was for a repair on the Johnson Street Bridge and that the bridge has an inspection gantry from which the repair work could be accessed. I showed Abrams Stantec’s drawing of the “critical” repairs and got him to estimate the cost of doing that work. Abrams phoned AJ Forsyth, a supplier of steel, for the price of the 20-foot length of four-inch by four-inch by three-eighths-inch angle iron that would be needed ($149), and estimated how much work would be involved in welding six 32-inch-long pieces onto the bridge: 13.5 hours. Abrams said he could do the job for $1229 plus HST. Doubling that estimate so as to include the “less serious” repairs, we get a total of $2500 plus HST to make the bridge safe for pedestrians, cyclists and train traffic.

When I told him the City estimated it would cost $120,000, Abrams said, “I call shenanigans on that.”

Note that Abrams’ estimate is only two percent of what the City claimed the repairs would cost. The FOI we filed on April 7 provided an incomplete record of an email conversation between City communications staff and senior managers discussing how to present cost and other information about repairing the bridge to media and council. Remarkably, City staff seemed to be working on this issue even before Stantec wrote their report on March 30.

The record we have starts with an email sent at 9:05 on the morning of March 30—the day after Stantec inspected the bridge—to senior managers from communications coordinator Kristin Quayle.

Quayle emailed an “Updated Issue Briefing,” and asked for feedback. (Focus doesn’t know exactly what that document said or when it had first been created; for some reason the City didn’t provide it to us even though they were required by provincial law to do so.) Fifteen minutes later, Quayle’s boss, corporate communications director Katie Josephson, wrote back and made several comments, including: “The level of detail about welding angle iron might be more than they need...as I’m sure no one will know what that is.” She also asked, “Are we confident on the estimates? Please weigh the risk/benefit of sharing these estimates now (before next week) as media and council will grab onto those.”

An hour and a half later, Quayle sent another email to the same managers with an updated “Issues Briefing.” (The City did provide us with this document.) Quayle had apparently sharpened her pencil based on Josephson’s suggestions. There was now no mention of “angle iron.” We don’t know if the estimated cost also rose in those 90 minutes in response to Josephson’s suggestion, but in her updated brief Quayle noted, “Estimated cost for repairs to continue to have the bridge open for pedestrians and cyclists is $10,000.” She added that to keep the bridge open for train service would cost “an additional $40,000” which would require roughly four weeks of repairs...

Quayle’s brief also noted “the City has an annual maintenance budget...which would cover the cost of these repairs.”

One week later, the publicly announced price was $120,000, but apparently no written record exists to explain why.

There’s a strong suggestion here that the City manufactured a phony emergency and then came up with a phony price for what it
When I told him the City estimated it would cost $120,000, Abrams said, “I call shenanigans on that.”

would cost to make the repairs, money that City councillors would not agree to spend. The bridge would then be seen by the public as unquestionably at the end of its useful life. The question is “Why would the City do this?”

Perhaps because City managers had just learned that one of the major financial risks associated with the project—a 3-foot diameter Telus duct filled with sensitive fibre optic and copper cables lying right where the new bridge will be built—had abruptly reared onto its hind legs and was about to give them a vicious bite.

On March 25, Joost Meyboom of MMM Group, the engineering company shepherding the project for the City, sent a memo to the City’s Mike Lai outlining the situation. Surveys had determined that the duct, which the City had known all along lay directly in the alignment of the new bridge, would have to be relocated rather than simply protected.

But the City had only budgeted $1.3 million for the duct problem. A source at Telus has told Focus $1.3 million is unlikely to cover even the cost of dredging for a new duct, let alone any of the other work involved. An official Telus spokesperson, Catherine Peters, declined to give Focus any details about the project in mid-August, noting: “We’re still working on our planning with the City.” (Focus has since filed an FOI with the City.)

Ironically, this is the same issue that contributed to huge cost overruns and lawsuits for San Francisco’s Fourth Street Bridge rehabilitation project, which several Victoria City councillors cited as influential in their choice to support a replacement bridge. The irony is that rehabilitating the existing Johnson Street Bridge would not have involved relocating the Telus duct.

So, suddenly faced with an embarrassing miscalculation and a cost overrun of millions of dollars even before shovels were in the ground, the City may have decided that, in an election year, the best defense is a good offense. Create a public perception of a dangerous, unsafe bridge that must be replaced. Hence the phony emergency and the massaged repair bill.

Will voters call shenanigans on that in November?

David Broadland is the publisher of Focus. He’s posted relevant documents at www.focusonline.ca.

Glow gorgeous...naturally!

Your skin is a living organ,” says Shelley Rollick-Collins, a paramedical esthetician and owner of Glow Rescue. What you put into your body feeds the blood, which in turn nourishes the skin. Your skin will reflect the ups and downs of your lifestyle from over exposure to sun, through stress, diet, sleep, alcohol intake, or just life.

Healthy living is a process, so work on one thing at a time, suggests Shelley, to get your skin to glow beautifully and naturally.

Start with a healthy digestive system. If your digestive system is off, this can show up in your skin. Healthy eating is your best weapon, as well as taking digestive enzymes and probiotics with meals to ensure proper absorption and to make sure there are enough “good bacteria” present in the intestinal tract to keep that balance intact.

Glow Rescue offers a selection of non-invasive treatments designed to address inflammation associated with rosacea, acne and aging.

Remember to “feed your face,” says Shelley. Always nourish your skin with nutritious, whole foods and keep sugar, white flour products, and alcohol use to a minimum. These skin enemies cause a variety of forms of inflammation, including exacerbating acne and rosacea—and leave you looking older than your years, if you eat too much on a daily basis.

You’ll want to incorporate into your daily diet enough of the right foods, ones that are minimally processed, like fresh fruits and vegetables, raw nuts and seeds, whole grains, and good quality proteins. Shelley gives us some of her top “natural face lifting” foods:

• Wild Salmon is chock full of skin beautifying Omega 3 fatty acids.
• Blueberries are an antioxidant superstar, and the anti-inflammatory effects protect you from premature aging.
• Sweet Potatoes give a big boost of beauty enhancing beta-carotene, a powerful antioxidant which keeps skin smooth and wrinkle free.
• Walnuts contain omega 3 fatty acids and vitamin E, to keep skin plump, smooth, and supple.
• Dark Chocolate that is at least 60 percent cacao, is a “sinfully delicious” skin treat that contains as many polyphenols and potent antioxidants as red wine without the skin dehydrating and aging side effects. Just remember a little goes a long way, and you can eat a bit every day.

Besides such great dietary advice, Glow Rescue offers a selection of non-invasive treatments designed to address inflammation associated with rosacea, acne and aging, for your best skin ever. Glow Rescue’s own line of skin care products—high in active ingredients but minus the harmful fillers—also help prevent and treat damage.

Ingredient of the month: DMAE

DMAE stands for dimethylaminoethanol, a nutrient that is found in abundance in fish, such as salmon and sardines. When applied topically to the skin, DMAE can help the skin to renew itself and help maintain a healthy moisture balance. DMAE also helps to increase skin firmness, and give the skin more elasticity. Once you begin using DMAE, you will start to see a difference in the quality of your skin within a few weeks. The skin begins to feel smooth and supple, and regular use prevents and smooths fine lines and wrinkles. DMAE can be found in Glow Rescue’s own “Nutrio Advanced Recovery Complex” anti-aging moisturizer.

A complimentary consultation with Shelley in her pleasant downtown clinic will give her the opportunity to educate you on how to maximize and maintain a healthy glow for life.

Glow Rescue Skin Solutions
Shelley Rollick-Collins
907 Gordon Street (off Broughton)
250.385.7546 • glowrescue@shaw.ca
www.glowrescue.ca
Clayton Jevne, Theatre Inconnu co-founder and artistic director, has weathered as many storms as the average four-masted sailing ship. Somehow he has survived, in a small city with several theatre companies, through government apathy and demographic fluctuation. Besides running Theatre Inconnu for three decades and 100 productions, Jevne was the artistic director at Victoria’s summer Shakespeare Festival for over 10 years.

Richard Olafson, Ekstasis Editions publisher and Theatre Inconnu board member says, “Clayton is one of the most committed artists in Victoria. He has been struggling and enduring many hardships and triumphs over the course of decades in the arts with consistency and vision.”

Although he has continually challenged the conventional wisdom through his innovative productions, the polymath downplays his significant influence as a Victoria cultural worker. He is essentially a shy man of ideas, a philosopher fool in foolish times.

Originally drawn to study paleontology, Jevne discovered his real vocation when he participated in student productions and moved from fossils to footlights. When a related opportunity knocked, he segued to puppets, which he still integrates into “regular” productions, most famously his “One Man Hamlet.”

I ask him why he finds puppets so compelling. Is it a control thing, managing all the characters? Or does he like the separation of himself from the physical entity in the spotlight?

“ Probably both,” he laughs. “It took me a decade to get over stage fright, and the puppets taught me a lot.” Now his signature is bravura solo performances.

Jevne’s solo Hamlet has been re-staged several times in the past 20 years and his Moscow Station, which he’s been invited to show in New York in the fall, is an acting tour de force. Is it economics that dictate theatre uno or does Jevne enjoy the challenge of holding an audience all by himself?

“I like to experiment on myself, but I also love to work with an ensemble,” he answers. “However,” he adds, “there are uncertainties that plague repertory theatre. It is hard to predict how the federal and provincial governments are going to change the rules and undermine continuity.”

Olafson agrees, “Clayton is an example to all of us who work in the arts. He has stayed the course through the dry spells when he was the only alternative to commercial theatre.”

Keeping actors alive and working is a challenge; and theatre is an expensive art form. Jevne is grateful that the new intimate stage at the 80-seat Little Fernwood Hall has given him an ideal platform for alternate “chamber” productions. “If we performed to full houses all the time, we could almost meet our financial challenges.”

I wonder if he sees theatre, the most socially interactive, the most political medium, as a threat to governments that thrive on ignorance and superstition—and therefore being an obvious target for cuts?
Jevne smiles and shrugs. When a trained actor makes a gesture, it speaks large. He says he tries to stay focused on the human condition. “I just wait for change,” he says enigmatically.

Jevne has a Bachelor’s degree in acting, a Master of Fine Arts in directing, and a PhD in theatre (more specifically, actor-training research) from the University of Victoria, where he also teaches in the theatre department. If Jevne has an obsession, it is authenticity: “I am looking for the authenticity of the actor whose responses are conditioned by good training.”

About the only thing Jevne hasn’t done for his productions is write his own scripts. He admits, “I have insecurities about my literary skills, and prefer to produce great plays rather than attempt to write them.”

This season’s ambitious, diverse lineup proves there are others who Jevne—and Inconnu’s associate artistic director Graham McDonald—can rely on for script writing. Following the exquisitely written Shining City (by Conor McPherson), which runs through October 8, they will re-mount the popular rock musical Love Kills at the Phoenix Theatre from October 13-22. Based on a true story—which also inspired Oliver Stone’s Natural Born Killers and Terrence Malick’s Badlands—the thought-provoking musical is by award-winning playwright Kyle Jarrow. Its four characters, both the criminals and the sheriff and his wife, are seen examining—and ultimately assuming responsibility for—their own actions and responses.

In December, Theatre Inconnu presents the black comedy A Day in the Death of Joe Egg, still socially relevant when special needs have yet to become a social priority; and Emily Carr House will see an on-site production of A Christmas Carol with an egalitarian message that Carr’s ghost would likely applaud.

Married to ethically committed playwright Ellen Arrand, and the son of prairie schoolteachers descended from pioneer farmers, Jevne brings the values that gave us Medicare and populist politics to scrutiny under the spotlights. “My father wanted his herd to be a legacy handed down the generations.” Perhaps that is what he is giving us in performances that have a common root in the 4-H pledge to lead community with head, heart, hands and health. Do we hear his appreciative audiences mooing?

See www.theatreinconnu.com for details about productions and tickets.

Linda Rogers is the editor of Framing the Garden, a poet laureate legacy project. Please contact Ekstasis Editions (ekstasis@islandnet.com) to inquire about sponsorships and readings and signings by Victoria poets and visual artists.

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Continuing to October 9
**FOOD FOR THOUGHT**
Coast Collective Gallery
Works inspired by local eating, the harvest and everything food. 3221 Heatherbell Rd, 250-391-5522, www.coastcollective.ca.

Continuing to October 13
**UNFORESEEN CIRCUMSTANCES**
Collective Works Gallery
Three artists—Kathy Guthrie, Alice Young and Cheryl McBride—look both forwards and backwards to reflect on how our lives can change under unforeseen circumstances. 1311 Gladstone Ave, 250-590-1345, www.collectiveworks.ca.

Continuing to October 15
**THE MELVILLE BOYS**
Langham Court Theatre
Norm Foster, one of Canada’s most prolific playwrights, penned this tale of two brothers and two sisters who run into each other at a lakeside cabin. $10-$19. 250-384-2142, www.langhamtheatre.ca.

Continuing to October 15
**I LOVE LUCY: LUCY SCHAPPY**
Red Art Gallery
Indulge in the layered and colourful paintings of Lucy Schappy, plus other gallery favourites. 2033 Oak Bay Ave, www.redartgallery.ca.

Continuing to October 21
**PHOTO CONTEST**
Saanich Parks and Recreation

October 1
**Palm Court Light Orchestra**
University Centre Auditorium
Mezzo Soprano Sarah Fryer helps this local orchestra kick off their silver jubilee season. 7:30pm at 3800 Finnerty Rd, $30. 250-721-8480, www.palmcourtorchestra.com.

October 1-3
**ART OF THE COCKTAIL**
Crystal Gardens
This annual fundraiser for the Victoria Film Festival features a grand tasting, workshops, cocktail tours and more. 250-389-0444, www.artofthecocktail.ca.

October 1-13
**PAUL JORGENSEN’S ITALIAN STYLE**
West End Gallery
Aerial views of Italian vistas feature clusters of houses, twisted paths, elongated shapes, elaborate patterning and hot colours. His work is both dramatic and whimsical. 1203 Oak Bay Ave, 250-595-2777, www.westengallery.com.

October 2
**CHEF SURVIVAL IV**
Madrona Farm
Watch local chefs tackle an obstacle course, pick vegetables and cook a local feast in this fundraiser for The Land Conservancy. Expect delicious food, music and a beer garden. 11:30am at 4317 Blenkinsop Rd, $50 per person, or $100 for family of 4. www.chefsurvivalchallenge.com.

October 2-20
**CITROENS & LANDSCAPES: ADAM CURRY**
Polychrome Fine Arts

October 2-November 2
**A SHARING OF LIFE’S GIFTS**
Goward House

October 4
**OPEN WORD WITH LEE HENDERSON**
Open Space
A reading from and interview with this Vancouver-based author of “The Broken Record Technique” and “The Man Game.” 7:30pm at 510 Fort St, by donation, www.openspace.ca.

October 5
**PAUL WALDE**
University of Victoria
Multidisciplinary artist and visual arts curator for the London Ontario Live Arts Festival talks about his wide range of works. 8pm at Room A 162 of UVic’s Visual Arts Building. Free, www.finearts.uvic.ca.
ILLNESSES COME IN MANY FORMS, BUT SOME ILLNESSES carry a greater stigma than others. Mental illness is one of these. Many people will suffer secretly and avoid treatment to avoid the stigma. The Friends of Music Society challenges that stigma and counters many of the misconceptions about mental illness through the language of music.

The society was founded in 1989, and now boasts five different ensembles for musicians of all levels. There are also opportunities for beginners to learn an instrument. The more advanced groups, like the Mood Swing Orchestra, Minds at Work, and the Moodswing Chorus, invite members of the community to join in. According to Sharon Johnson, a trombone player with the Moodswing Orchestra, this arrangement is mutually advantageous, “they [the community members] see that often people with a mental illness are just very normal people. So I think that it’s just as beneficial to the community members as for people with mental illness! If you have a sore, or a cold, you do something to fix it, and it’s the same with a depression or a bipolar disorder...It’s like any other physical problem.”

One of the mandates of the society, in fact, is to aid in healing. Over the years, executive director Debbie Maloff has witnessed remarkable transformations as a result of a person’s involvement with Friends of Music. Says Maloff, “FOM is a recovery based program, and that means restoring the person’s self esteem and confidence. And we see that. Where people may not have made eye contact previously, they start making eye contact. Where they may not have engaged or begun a conversation, they’ll engage with you and create a conversation.”

Certainly, having fun and making friends is a very important part of the program, as are public performances to spread the word. Program director Ben Beaudet is an exacting musician who works to get the most out of the performers. Johnson confirms that “he likes people to be challenged. But he is fun!” A listen to their performance of a jazzed-up “Disc Drive” theme for CBC radio displays a tight band, with exciting dynamics, complex rhythms, and good musicianship. This is a performance that would make any amateur group proud, regardless of any health issues.

The “Banding Together” fundraiser for the Society will be a key part of keeping its programs in place, as government funding has been severely cut. It promises to be an exciting evening with Virtual Elvis, Jug Bandits, Children of Celebrities (Folk and Roots), Swing on By, and Front Porch String Pickin’ Band.

Pro Patria/Trafalgar Legion #292 is at 411 Gorge Road East. Doors open at 6:30pm. Tickets $10, available at the door or at Friends of Music (2328 Trent St, 250-592-5114). www.friendsofmusic.ca.

—Lisa Szeker-Madden
“INNER HARBOUR” RICK BOND, 30 X 40 INCHES, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

October 1-15

RICK BOND: NEW WORKS
Madrona Gallery

This well-established artist’s career has evolved over the last three decades, allowing Bond to find his voice in a signature style of an expressive application of paint and bold colour in intricate and well-balanced compositions. This style of work compliments the ruggedness of our coastline. It captures the sense of energy in waves hitting the shore or wind sweeping through the trees. Bond’s work is found in galleries throughout Canada and private collections around the world. Opening Oct 1, 1-4pm with artist in attendance. 606 View St, 250-380-4660, www.madronagallery.com.

“FRANKS FARM” DESIREE BOND, 12 X 12 INCHES, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

October 3-November 12

DESIRÉE BOND: WEST COAST IMAGES
Eclectic Gallery

Experimenting with different mediums, subject matter and points of view, Desiree Bond has in recent years taken to painting en plein air where the west coast of Vancouver Island provides her with endless inspiration—as do her fellow artists in the Al Frescoes. “You have to try to decide quickly what to paint, with so many choices. [By lunch] most of us have a somewhat completed painting…I have learned so much just seeing how other artists interpret the same scene.” Reception with artist, Oct 6, 7-9pm. 2170 Oak Bay Ave, 250-590-8095, www.eclecticgallery.ca.

“MOUNT BAKER ALPENGLOW” (DETAIL) RON PARKER, 14 X 36 INCHES, ACRYLIC ON BOARD

Throughout October

RON PARKER
Peninsula Gallery

Contemporary landscape painter Ron Parker distills BC scenes down to their essential elements. His striking canvases are noted for strong line, form and colour which evoke a meditative mood. A professional artist for more than 30 years, Ron earned international acclaim as a highly detailed wildlife artist. His evolution as an artist has brought him to his current simple yet powerful work. 100 - 2506 Beacon Ave, Sidney, 250-655-1282, www.pengal.com.

“GIANT HORNBILL” RICKY KIANG

October 10-31

GALLERY ARTISTS
Alcheringa Gallery

Featuring works by Richard Sumner, Rande Cook, lesssIE, Rick Rivet and Dylan Thomas. Select Sepik River carvings will also be featured at reduced prices to make room in the collection for fabulous new work arriving in the gallery this winter from artists such as Claytus Yambon, Teddy Balangu and Kaua Gita. View online at www.alcheringa-gallery.com. 665 Fort St. 250-383-8224.
Introducing Kim Matthews Wheaton

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

Federation of Canadian Artists - Victoria Fall Juried Show
October 1st - 31st Reception September 30th 7:00 - 9:00 pm
On Alpha Street at 428 Burnside Road East 250-388-6652
morrisgallery.ca

The Sunken Garden Paul Jorgensen, 48 x 48 inches, acrylic on canvas

WEST END GALLERY
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Paul Jorgensen’s ITALIAN STYLE
October 1 - 13, 2011

Gallery Hours: Mon - Fri 10 - 5:30  Sat 10 - 5  Sun 11-4
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1203 Broad Street • 250-388-0009 • www.westendgalleryltd.com
October 7-9
BALLET ROCKS
McPherson Playhouse
Ballet Victoria brings an eclectic mix of choreography, dance and music, featuring tunes by Pink Floyd, Bach and many others. With musical guest Denise Djokic. 8pm Oct 7-8, 2pm Oct 9 at #3 Centennial Sq. $25 and up. 250-386-6121, www.balletvictoria.ca.

October 6-16
THE FLYING DUTCHMAN
Royal Theatre
Pacific Opera Victoria launches its latest season with Richard Wagner’s tale of a woman’s unrequited love for a cursed mariner. German with English surtitles. 8pm Oct 6, 8, 12 and 14 and 2:30pm Oct 16 at 805 Broughton. $37.50 and up. 250-386-6121, www.pov.bc.ca.

October 6-November 3
NEW PERSPECTIVES: IRA HOFFECKER
Dales Gallery
Abstract acrylic and resin works that reference urban planning and topography. 537 Fisgard, 250-381-1552, www.dalesgallery.ca.

October 7-23
ROMP! FESTIVAL OF INDEPENDENT DANCE
various venues
Now in its 14th year, Romp! celebrates cutting-edge independent dance from all over the world with public performances, dance films, art exhibitions, talks and more. www.suddenlydance.ca.

October 8
HEARTH ECO HOME OPENING
Heathcote Eco Home, Sidney
See works from artisans/artists Phil Makin, Peter Said, Claudia Lorenz, Chris Paul and others at the opening of this new ecologically-oriented design shop. 10am-6pm at 2348 Beacon Ave, Sidney.

October 11, 15
THE EMILY CARR PROJECT
University Centre Auditorium
The Victoria Symphony premieres Emily Carr-inspired compositions by Tobin Stokes, Veda Hille, Anna Hostman and more. Performances by Veda Hille, Marion Newman and the Emily Carr String Quartet will also be featured. 8pm at 3800 Finnerty Rd, UVic. $33 and up. 250-721-8480, www.victoriasymphony.ca.

October 12
VICTORIA BOOK PRIZE GALA
Union Club of Victoria
Hear readings from the finalists for both the City of Victoria Butler Book Prize and the Bolen Books Children’s Book Prize, then find out who the winner is. Finalists are: Carla Funk, Jack Hodgins, Stephen Hume, Sylvia Olsen, John Schreiber, Kristi Bridgeman, Sarah N. Harvey, Arthur John Stewart. 7:30pm at 805 Gordon St, $10. 250-721-8480, www.victoriabookprizes.ca.

October 12-23
ASPECT/STRATA: PAUL SHEPHERD
Coast Collective Gallery
Works spanning Shepherd’s last 10 years of painting. Meet the artist 6pm Oct 14 at 3221 Heatherbell Rd, 250-391-5522, www.coastcollective.ca.

October 12-23
NANA’S NAUGHTY KNICKERS
St Luke’s Hall

October 13-22
LOVE KILLS
Phoenix Theatre
The season kicks off with a spotlight on alumni, as Theatre Inconnu mounts this rock musical inspired by two real-life serial killers. (See story, page 14.) 3800 Finnerty Rd, $22. 250-721-8000, www.arts.arts.uvic.ca.
October 14-22
**ANTIMATTER FILM FESTIVAL**
various venues
A showcase of experimental and innovative film from local, national and international artists. Installations, short programs and feature-length films will be screened at several venues around Victoria. www.antimatter.ws.

October 14-15
**ONE-MAN LORD OF THE RINGS & ONE-MAN STAR WARS TRILOGY**
Metro Studio
Charles Ross returns with his acclaimed solo interpretations of these popular films. 7pm and 9pm, $21. 250-590-6291, www.intrepidtheatre.com.

October 14-27
**HIROMI SUZUKI AND MINORI DEWA**
Collective Works Gallery
Two painters from Japan are featured in this special show. 1311 Gladstone Ave, 250-590-1345, www.collectiveworks.ca.

October 15
**AN EVENING WITH JANE GOODALL**
Alix Goolden Hall
World-renowned chimpanzee researcher Jane Goodall reflects on 50 years of discoveries. Presented by the Jane Goodall Institute of Canada and Royal Roads University. 7:30pm at 907 Pandora. $45.50 and up. 250-386-6121, www.janegoodall.ca.

October 15
**AFRICAN EVENING**
Cordova Bay United Church
A multimedia presentation about the For the Love of Africa Society’s visit to Tanzania to build a school in May 2011. 7pm at 813 Claremont Ave, by donation. 250-891-0762, www.fortheloveofafrica.org.

October 15
**PULP FICTION QUOTE-ALONG**
Vic Theatre
If you know what they call a quarter-pounder with cheese in France, you’ll be a shoe-in for the Victoria Film Festival’s second quote-along movie. Prizes for costumes. 7pm at 808 Douglas St, 19+, $10, www.victoriafilmfestival.com.

October 17
**PEN IN HAND READINGS**
Cook Street Village Serious Coffee
Patricia Young, Arlene Paré, Julie Paul, Cynthia Kerkham, Patricia Young, Arlene Paré, Julie Paul, Cynthia Kerkham, Claudia Haagan and Barb Henderson all read at this monthly gathering. Open Mic sign-up 7:15pm, readings 7:30pm-9pm at 230 Cook St, $3. 250-590-8010.

October 18
**ACROSS THE GENERATIONS**
Red Art Gallery

October 19
**IN NATURE’S REALM**
Royal Theatre

October 20-31
**THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER**
Craigdarroch Castle
This site-specific adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe’s macabre short story is back just in time for Halloween. $25, Advance tickets required. 250-592-5323, www.thecastle.ca.

October 21-22
**BANQUO FOLK ENSEMBLE**
All Saints-by-the-Sea/St Mary Magdalen
Head to the Islands to see this early music group perform ancient ballads of murder and mayhem in time for the spooky season. 7:30pm Oct 21 at 110 Park Drive, Ganges and 7:30pm Oct 22 at 360 Georgina Point Rd, Mayne Island. $15, www.banquo.ca.

October 22
**THE EMILY CARR PROJECT: USING EMILY**
Intrepid Theatre Club
A group of Victoria theatre, dance, musical and interdisciplinary artists explore the impact of this influential artist. 8pm at 2-1609 Blanshard St (at Fisgard St), by donation. www.intrepidtheatre.com.

October 22
**ADONIS Puentes**
University Centre Auditorium
Juno-nominated Cuban-Canadian singer and his band. 8pm at 3800 Finnerty Rd, $25. 250-721-8480, www.auditorium.uvic.ca.

October 22
**CELTIC CONCERT AND CEILIDH DANCE**
St Matthias Church
Celebrated local musicians Qristina and Quinn Bachand perform with a few friends. 7pm at 600 Richmond Ave, $15 adults, $10 students/seniors, kids under 8 free. 250-472-0999, www.qbachand.com.

October 22
**MEYERS, HAYDN & MOZART**
University Centre Auditorium
The first in Victoria Symphony’s Classical Series, featuring Christi Meyers on violin. 2.30pm at 3800 Finnerty Rd, $53. 250-721-8480, www.victoriasymphony.ca.

October 23-November 10
**STRANGE FRUIT IN GHOSTLAND**
Polychrome Fine Arts

October 25-November 27
**25 YEARS OF THE ISLANDS ILLUSTRATORS**
Cedar Hill Recreation Arts Centre
Works from the Island Illustrators’ Society and the launch of Ray St Amour’s new book, which documents 68 society members from over the years. Reception 7pm Oct 27 at 3220 Cedar Hill X Rd, 250-475-7121, www.islandillustrators.org.

October 26
**ART CLAY**
University of Victoria
Art Clay’s works use a wide range of media to create performance-based art. He speaks at 9pm in Room A 162 of UVic’s Visual Arts Building Fee, www.finearts.uvic.ca.
Amy Rice uses non-traditional printmaking methods as a starting point for original mixed media pieces printed on antique papers, including hand-written love letters, envelopes, journal pages, sheet music and maps. "My work is deeply layered, often both literally and figuratively. My imagery—nostalgic and wistful—is largely biographical...I am inspired by bicycles, street art, gardening, random found objects, collective endeavours that challenge hierarchy, acts of compassion, downright silliness, and things with wings." Preview by appointment on Oct 6. Opens Oct 7, 104-860 View Street. 250-213-1162, www.viewartgallery.ca.

"CANADIAN ROAD TRIP" AMY RICE, 4 X 6 INCHES, GOCCO PRINT ON CANADIAN MAP

October 7-29
GROWING A SENSE OF DIRECTION
View Art Gallery

Applying paint in broad, thick strokes, renowned BC artist Rod Charlesworth builds up each layer to create light and depth. With an abundance of dramatic scenery to choose from and endless inspiration readily available, this collection showcases the wonders of the land. Featuring iconic Canadian scenes, from bold landscapes to children playing hockey on the pond, his work captures our unique Canadian cultural identity. Ever popular with collectors, Rod has excelled in creating a distinct and consistent style. 1203 Broad St. 250-388-0009, www.westendgalleryltd.com.

"ABOVE LAKE OKANAGAN, AUTUMN" ROD CHARLESWORTH, 24 X 48 INCHES, OIL ON CANVAS

October 22-November 3
ROD CHARLESWORTH CANADIANA PALETTE
West End Gallery

The Federation of Canadian Artists (FCA) is a national organization founded in 1941. The Victoria Chapter, with 150 members, offers regular programs and workshops designed to raise artistic standards. Each spring and fall, the Victoria Chapter holds a juried show with approximately 150 paintings submitted for each show, and one-third selected. The result is a first-class exhibition, varied in style and media, featuring the best works of 30-40 of the region’s top artists. Opening reception September 30, 7-9pm. On Alpha St at 428 Burnside Rd E. 250-388-6652, www.morrisgallery.ca.

"MAGNOLIA PROUETTE" SANDY TERRY, 30 X 40 INCHES, MIXED MEDIA/ ACRYLIC

Throughout October
FEDERATION OF CANADIAN ARTISTS
Morris Gallery

The result is a first-class exhibition, varied in style and media, featuring the best works of 30-40 of the region’s top artists. Opening reception September 30, 7-9pm. On Alpha St at 428 Burnside Rd E. 250-388-6652, www.morrisgallery.ca.
Desiree Bond
“West Coast Images”
October 3 - November 12
Opening Reception: Thursday, October 6, 7 - 9pm
2170 Oak Bay Avenue • 250.590.8095 • www.eclecticgallery.ca

Rick Bond
New Works
October 1 – 15
Opening reception Oct 1-15
606 View Street • 250.380.4660 • www.madronagallery.com

Add art to your life.
October 27-November 27
CELEBRATE SUCCESS: 25 YEARS OF THE ISLAND ILLUSTRATORS SOCIETY
Cedar Hill Recreation Arts Centre

IS 25 YEARS A LONG TIME? It depends on who you ask. In terms of a human life, one could argue it’s not long at all; but if you’re talking about a group or institution, a quarter-century could be considered a milestone.

“I think any organization that manages to stay fresh and current for 25 years should be celebrated,” says Joanne Thomson, a member and past-president of the Island Illustrators Society, which turns 25 this year. “As a mentoring organization, we have seen many of our members go on to successful careers in illustration, graphic design and fine art.”

In addition to mentoring, the society has offered its artists lots of opportunities for exposure through mediums like their website and public exhibitions, such as this month’s Celebrate Success show at the brand new Cedar Hill Recreation Art Centre. The 25 artists with works in the exhibit are members Raymond St Arnaud, Kristi Bridgeman, Caroline Stengl, Marlene Howell, Joane Moran, Verna Linney, Olga Lang, Greg Glover, Joanne Thomson, Allegra Vernon, Dawn Joy Ritchie, Wendy Page, Marcia Semenoff, Maria Miranda Lawrence, Karel Doruyter, Victor Bosson/ArtLife, Iris Churcher, Sandy Terry, Lorne Miller, Ian Finlayson, Ken Horn, Bob McPartlin, Barbara Weaver-Bosson, Rory Phillips and Kathy Cameron.

The event will also serve as the launch for photographer Raymond St Arnaud’s new book, which features portraits of past and present illustrators in their studios.

“The 25th anniversary was coming up and it seemed like an appropriate moment to create a document of who the illustrators had been and who they are,” says St Arnaud, who has been a member of the Island Illustrators Society since the late ‘90s.

The book contains biographies, archived posters, brief essays and portraits of 68 of the 300-odd members the Island Illustrators has seen over the years, some of whom don’t even live on the Island anymore. St Arnaud says he began taking the photographs in October of last year, and that each portrait required careful consideration of the artists’ widely varying studio spaces.

“Sometimes it’s quite large, sometimes it’s very, very tiny. I try and place [the artist] so I can see them and their environment and some of their art,” he says of his approach. “I often like to balance the exposure so you can see what they see when they’re looking out the window and daydreaming or something.”

St Arnaud says he originally envisioned the book, which is a personal project (and a nice complement to Coastal Moments, a colourful journal featuring work from 44 Island Illustrators which serves as its official 25th anniversary publication) as an image-only project containing portraits of about 35 artists.

“It grew a bit bigger than I had envisioned at the beginning...but you just take it as it comes,” he says. “More people kept crawling out of the woodwork, so I kept photographing.”

Celebrate Success: 25 Years of the Island Illustrators Society opens at 7pm Thursday, October 27 at the new Cedar Hill Recreation Art Centre, 3220 Cedar Hill Rd. Information on Raymond St Arnaud’s book and Coastal Moments will be available at the opening. The show runs to November 27. Call 250-475-7121 or visit www.islandillustrators.org for more information.

—Amanda Farrell-Low

Current and former Island Illustrators in their studios (top to bottom): Ken Steacy, Kristi Bridgeman, Bob McPartlin, and Natalie Shumka. All photos by Raymond St Arnaud.
October 26-November 2
OFF LABEL FESTIVAL
Open Space
A week-long festival featuring international artists and intellectuals exploring health, spirituality and the effects of technology in the digital age. “The Art of the Placebo” exhibition and other events will take place at 510 Fort St, www.openspace.ca.

October 27
HOLLY COLE
McPherson Playhouse
Juno Award-winner Holly Cole brings her sultry voice to town in support of Community Living Victoria. 8pm at #3 Centennial Sq, $58 and up. 250-386-6121, www.rmts.bc.ca.

October 27
VICTORIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
James Bay New Horizons Centre
Fourth-generation Vancouver Islander and author Susan Mayse talks about her recent book exploring Greater Victoria’s development. 7:30pm at 234 Menzies St, www.victoriahistoricalsociety.bc.ca.

October 27-29
MAGICAL MUSIC OF DISNEY
Royal Theatre
The Victoria Symphony performs music from Disney favourites like the Lion King, Mary Poppins, Beauty and the Beast and others. 2pm Oct 27 and 8pm Oct 28-29 at 805 Broughton. $33, 250-385-6815, www.victoriasymphony.ca.

October 28-30
ENCHANTED HALLOWEEN
Heritage Acres Farm
Explore this family-friendly Halloween wonderland. Live music, performers, pumpkins, lanterns and more. A fundraiser for Intrepid Theatre. 5pm-9pm Oct 28-29 and 12pm-5pm Oct 30 at 7321 Lochside Dr, Central Saanich. $15 adults, $10 children, $40 family, ages 4 and under free. www.enchantedhalloween.com.

October 28-January 2
PROMISING OBJECTS: ALLISON MACTAGGART
Art Gallery of Great Victoria
MacTaggart uses parameters from the Canadian Intellectual Property Office to guide her exploration of inventors and artists and their ongoing desire to find solutions to problems and ideas. Opens 8pm Oct 28 at 1040 Moss St, www.aggv.ca.

October 29
SONG OF SONGS
Alix Goolden Hall
Performances of baroque and contemporary interpretations of the “Song of Solomon,” led by countertenor Matthew White. 8pm at 907 Pandora Ave, $30. 250-386-6121, earlymusicsoftheislands.com.

October 29-30
A CELEBRATION OF YOUNG ARTISTS
Sooke Community Theatre/ Alix Goolden Hall
The Sooke Philharmonic Orchestra performs Beethoven’s “Symphony No. 7” and other works with members of the School District 61 Festival Orchestra. 8pm Oct 29 at 6218 Sooke Rd, 2:30pm Oct 30 at 907 Pandora Ave, $18. 250-642-2849, www.sookephil.ca.

Throughout October
EMILY CARR: ON THE EDGE OF NOWHERE
MODERN EYE: CRAFT & DESIGN
INDIAN & PERSIAN MINIATURE PAINTINGS
Art Gallery of Greater Victoria

Throughout October
VICTORIA FOLK MUSIC SOCIETY
Norway House

Throughout October
SCHOOL OF MUSIC CONCERTS
University of Victoria
All events free and at Philip T. Young Recital Hall unless otherwise noted. Every Friday: Friday music concerts featuring School of Music students, 12:30pm. Oct 3: Chieko Konishi Louie (flute) and Reiko Shimokawa (piano), 8pm. Oct 4: Joze’ Kolar (clarinet) and Bruce Vogt (piano), 12:30pm; Reiko Shimokawa lecture, 2:30pm, MacLaurin Rm 8037. Oct 5: Cheryl Pauls (piano), 12pm, includes lecture. Oct 9: Composition student concert, 8pm, by donation. Oct 17: Alwyn Huang (percussion) and the UVic Percussion Ensemble, 8pm. Oct 22: Faculty Chamber Music Series, 8pm, $17.50. Oct 23: UVic Chamber Singers, 8pm, by donation. Oct 25: Krista Bennion Feeney (violin) and Ajtony Csaba (keyboard), 8pm. Oct 28: UVic Orchestra, 8pm at University Centre Auditorium, $17.50.

Send ARTS-RELATED listings to focusedit@shaw.ca by the 10th of the month previous to the month of your event. Placement cannot be guaranteed.
John Luna

CHRISTINE CLARK

The costs and rewards of the artist’s life.

John Luna is telling a story. He is perched on a high stool, his face looking down at me as he speaks; there’s a continuous and agile flow of conversation, ideas and references, quite astonishing to experience. His dark eyes are tender with understanding; his voice is gentle; he uses his hands. He’s talking about inebriation; that seductive other reality that exists in perfect splendour alongside the sober day, eclipsing, for long moments, the struggle that is life. Not the drunkenness of alcohol, but of adulation.

The story has to do with giving a talk to a group of fellow artists at a gallery one spring night, earlier this year; it has to do with being successful within the microcosm of Victoria’s artistic community. Everyone was laughing, he says, and having a wonderful time. It was intoxicating and complete. When he returned home, his wife was waiting. She wanted to talk about money, about not having enough money. And this is the difficult part—this paradox: to be triumphant and at the same time, vulnerable. Financially. It’s unfathomable, but it’s real, and in the end he says, with emphasis, “there is only so long you can continue to demand support from the people around you.” His tone is grim, but not resentful.

John Luna is accomplished. His practice as an artist, a writer and a teacher is rigorous and profoundly generous. No absinthe-sipping bohemian, he. Luna began teaching long before he completed his MFA at the University of Calgary in 2002, working as a teaching assistant at the Victoria College of Art back in the mid-’90s while still a student. Since that time he has amassed enormous experience as an educator, most famously at the Vancouver Island School of Art, where he was instrumental in helping develop the well-known Slide Room Gallery. As a writer, his gorgeous and erudite essays on art have been widely published, and as a visual artist he has produced solo exhibitions and participated in group shows throughout Victoria, Western Canada and the US.

But all of this is not enough. There are obligations to be considered. Debts to be addressed, financial and otherwise. He has recently taken a position as an art and art history instructor at Brentwood College School, a monumental change of lifestyle on the cusp of his 40th birthday, one which he believes will be very beneficial to his family.

He expects that his work will change as well. The body of art John has been engaged with since grad school is as rich and complex as the artist himself. They are paintings and they are sculptures; physical and three dimensional, designed to hang away from the wall and to have more than a single face.

The earliest piece began as a solution to the problem of sagging canvas. Rather than re-stretching the painting, he freed it entirely
and began to apply papier mâché to its back. He explains, “that mâché was a controlled thing, but a little compulsive too and very pleasurable. This was the picture that ended up being called ‘Canyon.’ It was on burlap that had gotten very stiff with rabbit skin glue, and really became this shell-like form. I worked on one side then the other, oil on the painting side and acrylic and glue on the mâché side, enjoying the sense of avoiding the one side while working on the other.”

Since then, these works have come to incorporate frames and stitching and old copies of Camus’ and others’ books. If not sold or destined for another show, they are often dismantled and re-used in new works. Nothing is new, everything old and found. Fragments of canvas and string and paper are tied in and glued on; there is binding and wrapping. They are very human-feeling, peeling and ragged, somewhat frail and aged; desiccated survivors of some great dominating force: life, the artist, time. There is compassion. Nothing is vulgar; the colours and the materials recognizable and so, somehow steadying; remnants of a bygone era when paintings were blue and black and white and showed the sky and the sea; sometimes idyllic, sometimes nostalgic. But as unusual, perhaps, as it sounds, and really as rough as these works are, they are delicate and so kind. You can stand beside them and look into their centres and never feel scared. They are transcendent and magic, an incantation of acceptance. It’s important “to get through to where the work is light, getting away from the heaviness—to give people a sense of relief,” he says, and he does.

John’s studio is in the basement of his family’s home. The space is small; a corner carved out of a vast storehouse of toys and household equipment: unused light fixtures and other forgettable domestic items. A black shelving unit filled with books and a large torn canvas provide the studio with boundaries. Small tables are covered in thick drips and spills, there’s a wooden armchair and a rust coloured rug embedded with scraps of torn paper and other detritus. The actual walls are padded in a thick layer of temporarily unused materials.

As we talk, a small antique window conducts the brilliant September sunshine into his studio. We are momentarily interrupted by two curious 10-year-olds, one of whom is John’s daughter, the youngest of his three children. From upstairs can be heard the constant to and fro of feet moving from room to room. Spiders’ egg sacs hang in multitudes from the wooden beams overhead, and the moment has a clarity in it that makes it hard to leave, even when it is time to leave.

Christine Clark is an artist and writer who loves visiting artists in their studios. Past articles are at www.focusonline.ca. She also blogs at http://artinvictoria.com.
really feel like I haven’t seen this story told in this way—the multiple perspectives in this place,” Edugyan tells me during a brief break from tending to her six-day-old daughter. So what brought her into this foreign territory?

Born to Ghanaian parents in Calgary in the late 1970s, Edugyan came to BC for UVic’s writing program and has from here gone on to live and write around the world. With a Master’s in writing from Johns Hopkins, Edugyan has held multiple residencies internationally (including Scotland, Iceland, Hungary, Finland, Spain and Belgium) and lived for about five years in Germany. But she says Victoria—where she met her husband, poet Steven Price—has remained home base.

This peripatetic life has given Edugyan her own experience of foreignness. “I seem to end up living in these cities that are mostly homogenous,” she laughs warmly, noting that just like today’s largely-white Victoria, “there wasn’t exactly a huge black population in Alberta in the 1970s. So I’m really interested in these diaspora stories—the little pockets where people end up.”

This interest was first explored in her Hurston/Wright Legacy Award-nominated debut novel, *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* (Knopf, 2004), which describes the life of a Ghanaian immigrant to Canada settling in small-town Alberta. This second book also tells a diaspora story, with characters crossing oceans and continental European borders seeking freedom to live, love, and above all make music. Shifting back and forth from 1939-40 in Berlin and Paris to Baltimore, Germany and Poland in 1992, *Half-Blood Blues* chronicles in part just that: the difficulties of finding a place to belong, whether in the Jim Crow US, Nazi Germany or occupied France.

As a work of historical fiction, the book offers a glimpse into unsettling realities of this dark era—how Goering began collecting information on mixed-race children in 1933; the programs of forced sterilization; Goebbels’ Reichsmusikkammer (State Music Institute); and the insistence that musicians register in order to prevent degenerate influences like jazz. “I wouldn’t say the goal is to educate people, though,” Edugyan tells me. “Character is where I start from.”

Told in the first-person voice of Baltimorean bassist Sid Griffiths, the novel’s style is quick and intimate, natural and often hilarious. But Sid’s focus largely revolves around trumpet prodigy Hieronymus Falk (Hiero), who he witnessed being arrested in a Paris café in 1939, never to be heard from again. Falk “was a Mischling, a half-breed, but so dark no soul ever like to guess his mama a white Rhinelander.”

Through Falk, Edugyan addresses the experience of the so-called “Rhineland Bastards,” children of German women and occupying African soldiers from French colonies after World War I. “Having these African-American musicians coming overseas made for an interesting dichotomy set against this Afro-German experience,” Edugyan explains, adding that characters of varying racial backgrounds (Sid was the son of two quadroons: “so light-skinned, folks took me for white”) allowed her to examine the many ways to be black in that era and the ability—or inability—to navigate society based on skin colour and nationality.
HALF-BLOOD BLUES will interest not just historians, readers of war literature, music lovers and people interested in explorations of race, but any reader who appreciates beautiful, sharp writing that captures and expresses our deepest human dilemmas.

Much has been made of Edugyan’s deft, sensitive and original exploration of race during a particular period, but that is merely one of many elements to admire on the tour. Ultimately, like all great literature, this is a story about human nature, one that goes to the core of our most elemental themes and struggles. As a result, I was often put in mind of Greek tragedy: people under pressure wrestling and working out their relationship with issues of truth, pretence, friendship, love, betrayal, jealousy, rage, regret, hope and redemption—timeless themes which shine out as such against the backdrop of so specific a point in history. As Sid says when the musicians flee Berlin, “Ain’t no man can outrun his fate.”

So while it may have been a surprise to the author, it won’t be to any reader that Half-Blood Blues recently made the shortlist (with only five others) for the international Man Booker Prize for Fiction. She was surprised enough at being longlisted for the award: “I was eight months pregnant and sleeping” when the phone rang, Edugyan says. “Obviously you don’t anticipate such a thing. I had no idea the longlist was even being announced,” she laughs. Her book is also on the longlist for the Giller Prize. Both prizes will be announced in October.

With a newborn baby and fairly newborn book generating massive media attention, Edugyan is just feeling grateful, especially, she says, since the book’s birth was so difficult. Initially bought by Canadian Key Porter Books and slated to be released in February 2011, the company’s bankruptcy meant a delay in the domestic release. Published in the UK with Serpent’s Tail just in June, it only took a short time for Half-Blood Blues to come to the attention of Booker judges looking to reward, as the prize’s site states, “the very best book of the year.”

Half-Blood Blues will interest not just historians, readers of war literature, music lovers and people interested in explorations of race, but any reader who appreciates beautiful, sharp writing that captures and expresses our deepest human dilemmas. However long it may take for the next book—Edugyan is preoccupied with her new daughter right now: “She’s so beautiful!” she exults—“I look forward to wherever this resourceful, gifted guide might take us next.

Writer, editor and musician Arny Reiswig is going to listen to her Louis Armstrong records differently from now on.

Triangle Healing’s owner, Diane Regan, chuckles every time she thinks of the moniker—“The Home Depot for Health.” “When I heard one of our customers describe us in this way I laughed. “I love it,” says Regan. And while Triangle may not have quite the square footage that the popular do-it-yourself store enjoys, they do share a propensity for having huge inventories. In fact, Regan estimates that she stocks several hundreds of quality products.

Triangle Healing offers everything you need to support a healthy lifestyle. From blenders, dehydrators and hand-held massagers, to high-quality supplements, vitamins and EMF protection, to big-ticket items like far-infrared saunas and all-natural latex beds—Regan says they have it all.

The other similarities between Triangle and the hardware giant may be in expertise. “When I’m not on the floor with customers, I am immersed in research. It’s a passion of mine. Our clients count on us to have the latest information on what is hot and what is not in the healing world. We supply a lot of educational materials to help them make informed decisions.” explains Regan.

What’s hot right now? “Lots,” assures Regan. She’s particularly excited about a number of products, one being Adya Clarity—a paramagnetic sulphate mineral solution that is extracted from the rarest, most mineral-rich Biotite/Black Mica volcanic deposits of Mount Fuji. Its proprietary extraction process provides Adya with a purity that is unmatched and 100 percent bioavailable. Purify and optimize any water simply by adding Adya to it. The result is a pure solution that works to detoxify and hydrate at a cellular level, activate and assimilate oxygen and nutrients in your system, and stimulate efficient cellular metabolism. “I am realizing the potential of this product in terms of calcium-deposit related conditions like arthritis, kidney and gall stones. It is amazing,” says Regan.

What else is exciting this month? “BioResonance Lasers,” answers Regan. These compact hand-held lasers project more than 350 frequencies with a multitude of sub-harmonics. They offer detox from EMF charges including advanced frequencies to re-energize water and food—even when microwaved. They’re a perfect way to minimize the effects of an imperfect world.

Saunas are always hot (pun intended). “I love saunas both for their therapeutic and their relaxation value,” says Regan. “As winter starts to set in there’s no better way to warm your insides.” Triangle has a wide variety of far-infrared saunas that will work with almost any budget. “We do offer financing options and you can even come in and try them out,” Regan adds. Triangle offers a one-visit price, or you can buy a multiple-visit package.

So stop into this one-of-a-kind health store and see for yourself if the moniker isn’t fitting!

Triangle Healing Products
770 Spruce Avenue, Victoria, BC
250-370-1818 • www.trianglehealing.com

Triangle Healing Products, its owner, its employees do not provide medical advice or treatment. They provide information and products that you may choose after evaluating your health needs and in consultation with health professionals of your choosing.
Both the Fraser River sockeye and Pacific herring stocks are, by many accounts, on the verge of collapse, just as East Coast cod stocks did in the late 1980s. In the case of the cod, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans ignored early warnings from scientists and threatened some with loss of their jobs if they spoke out. Is that pattern repeating itself on the West Coast?

The unfolding presentations at the Cohen Commission Inquiry into the 2009 Fraser River sockeye collapse, as well as at a recent symposium on the collapse of the BC herring fishery, suggest that history may be repeating itself.

By the time the federal government imposed a moratorium on the eastern cod fishery in 1992, it was too late. Many questioned why the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) didn’t warn the government earlier.

The answer was made clear in 1997 with the publication of an article in the Canadian Journal of Fish and Aquatic Science. Entitled “Is Scientific Inquiry Incompatible with Government Information Control?” its authors, scientists Jeffrey Hutchings, Carl Walters and Richard Haedrich—two formerly with DFO—provided evidence of the suppression of and political interference with research by industry-influenced government officials. The article concluded:

“The present framework for linking science with management can, and has, led to abuses that threaten the ability of scientists to understand fully the causes of fish declines, to identify means of preventing fishery collapses from recurring, to incorporate scientific advice in management decisions, and to communicate research in a timely fashion to as wide an audience as possible. The existing framework of government-sponsored fisheries science needs to be replaced. It has failed to ensure viable fish resources and thereby sustain the fishing people and fishing communities upon which successful fisheries management depends. The economic and societal cost of this failure to Canada has been enormous.”
Similar issues with government scientists were expressed frequently at the recent and concurrent Cohen Commission and Simon Fraser University symposium on the herring collapse. Sifting through thousands of pages of documents, memos, emails, scientific papers and transcripts, it is hard to find reassurance that DFO has begun to separate research from industry collusion and not interfered in scientific conclusions. Nor has DFO allowed its scientists to communicate publicly about their research, except in controlled situations.

Independent researchers and representatives of coastal First Nations are showing signs that they will not tolerate a catastrophe of the scale of the eastern cod fishery here on the west coast—but it’s an upstream swim.

**Muzzled Miller**

Much of the attention at the Cohen Commission has centred around the testimony of DFO scientist Dr Kristi Miller. Miller heads a $6-million salmon-genetics project at the federal Pacific Biological Station in Nanaimo. She had an article published in the prestigious journal *Science* this past winter—but was ordered by her superiors not to do media interviews around it.

Miller uncovered what she described at the Cohen Commission as potentially the “smoking gun” for the sockeye collapse. In the course of running genomic profiles on sockeye, she discovered the vast majority of them were carrying the signature of a “novel” virus or parvovirus that could weaken the fish and make them vulnerable to a host of symptoms—variously called marine anemia and plasmacytoid leukemia. She stated that there were many elements of the history and timing of these diseases that potentially implicated this parvovirus in declines of other species of salmon—for example, Chinook in fish farms between 1988 and 1991—and that this is what tipped her to look at the possible linkages of this virus to the sockeye collapse.

Under questioning at the Commission, it was revealed that Dr Miller had prepared a report in 2009 that included her hypothesis that this virus may be suggestive that hatcheries and aquaculture were playing a role in the decline of the sockeye. But she was asked by her employer to remove this reference from her report. When asked why, Miller stated, “I honestly don’t remember the dialogue that occurred associated with that, but I think that many felt that to be highly speculative and not really well supported.”

She was also restricted from presenting at an earlier Simon Fraser think-tank into the sockeye salmon collapse. When asked about that, she stated, “I think that to be precautionary, they [DFO] would limit the exposure of scientists to any meetings that were likely to attract public attention and media.”

While she stated that she is not prevented from publishing her research, she added, “What we have been told is that we’re not to speak about our findings until we testify here in the Cohen Inquiry. I don’t know at what point that ban in speaking to the public will be lifted. I don’t believe it is lifted yet.”

Why didn’t Miller’s smoking gun, when first reported within DFO, trigger the highest red alert and demand the full cooperation of industry? Greg McDade, the lawyer representing biologist Alexandra
Morton, only had 15 minutes to determine why some obvious vectors for this mystery virus weren’t explored. He asked Miller why there had been no testing of Atlantic salmon in the fish farms, especially in light of the evidence (eventually released under public pressure) that symptoms of the anemia appeared in sampled farmed fish. Miller responded that she was approached by the BC Salmon Growers Association and told that, “The [fish farm] vets weren’t comfortable with testing for a signature” in their farmed Atlantic salmon, so to-date, none have been tested.

It came as a surprise to some that a DFO scientist cannot insist on testing farmed fish when there’s even a small chance that a lethal virus might infect wild stocks.

Miller’s appearance at the Cohen Commission, besides confirming how government scientists are prohibited from speaking freely, validated what critics have said about the aquaculture industry having too much power.

During the week of Miller’s testimony, the fish farms did agree to allow testing to proceed. But Miller may not be able to take advantage of their accommodation. As she stated at the Commission hearings: “Right now, I actually have no departmental money or outside money to work on sockeye salmon from the Fraser River.” That statement confirmed another major public concern: scientists unable to conduct needed research due to lack of funding.

**Morton at the Cohen Commission**

On the stand at the Cohen Commission, Alexandra Morton proudly proclaimed her independence: “I don’t work for a university, the government, the industry, or a First Nation—I’m completely independent.”

Damien Gillis, who observed the Cohen Commission, wrote after Morton’s appearance: “The fact is, throughout the aquaculture and disease hearings of the past several weeks, most of the Commission’s scientific experts either work for or have worked for the industry or government—a point Morton made clear in the final, heated exchange of the day.”

A biologist, Morton has worked and lived in the Broughton Archipelago for decades, before and during the period when it became home to a good portion of BC’s fish farms. She observed first-hand their practices and impacts—from the disappearance of the whales she had first gone there to study, to the rise of sea lice infestations on salmon. She has become an expert on sea lice—which often occur in crowded conditions of fish farm pens, and can carry diseases between farmed and wild stocks. Morton has published articles in scientific journals—including *Science*—on the subject.

In the course of her research, she has become both a passionate advocate for wild salmon and an articulate and severe critic of the aquaculture industry and the government.

As a person with a “substantial and direct interest in the subject matter of the inquiry,” Morton was granted official standing at the Cohen Commission. This allowed her to access the Commission’s databases—but not, much to her dismay, to divulge her findings, even when she discovered information she believed was critical to the health of salmon stocks.

At the Cohen Commission, she was questioned (some would say challenged) more about her credentials and her “disrespect” of other scientists than the 60-page report she prepared based on her analysis of the 500,000 pages of government documents that Cohen collected on the Fraser sockeye decline since 1992. She says her research led her to a clear understanding of what is happening to the sockeye, an understanding of why stocks declined in 2009 and rebounded in 2010. When she tried to submit her report to the inquiry, she says, “the lawyers for Canada and the Province of BC blocked me, saying it was ‘hearsay.’ They demanded I use my ‘living voice;’ when I tried to do that they blocked me, saying I am not a vet and therefore my opinion was not allowed.” (“Living voice” is a legal term referring to verbal presentation, as opposed to a document.)

Because of the way the Commission works—insisting that all documents gathered by the Commission be kept confidential unless a legal ruling is made or they become exhibits at the proceedings—Morton’s report is not available to us, fuelling the key public concern about access to information.

The Commission has not put up transcripts of Morton’s testimony as of press time, but on her blog Morton notes: “Only the sockeye that closely passed salmon farms collapsed. DFO science found evidence of a virus in the ones that were dying. The clinical condition of these fish and genomic evidence pointed to a mystery sickness that began in Chinook salmon farms on the Fraser sockeye route in the early 1990s, exactly when the sockeye began to collapse. The pale gills, swollen kidneys and tumour-like lesions were found in both the farm Chinook salmon and the sockeye. When the Norwegian companies quietly removed the Chinook farms mid-2007, the first sockeye generation that went to sea since 1992 without being exposed returned in historic numbers in 2010. This is what Canada and the Province of BC would not let me talk about. This is the uncomfortable truth that defies the policy that salmon farms do not kill wild salmon. I told the courtroom that when push comes to shove, the government hands it to the industry, not the wild salmon.”

She says that at the Commission, “The lawyers for Canada and the Province of BC did not want to hear about the emails where DFO scientists were talking about the dying sockeye in the Fraser River.”
They were trying to figure it out, but had no money. The government lawyers did not want to hear that the provincial vet examining farm salmon is meticulously documenting new lesions. He reports these lesions are similar to the dangerous Norwegian Salmon Alphavirus, Heart and Skeletal Muscle Inflammation (which causes the farm salmon to die of heart attacks as they are being harvested), Pancreatic Disease and Infectious Salmon Anemia virus. They did not want to hear that the province is developing tests for viruses they say are not here. They refused to meet me on the battlefield, opting instead to throw rocks from the bushes. They attacked my education, my Registered Professional Biologist standing, our freedom to move over the ocean freely in a boat, and the right to free speech.”

With so much at stake, at an inquiry that is perhaps the last chance to prevent the salmon from going the way of the cod, it doesn’t seem a wise way to treat an independent scientist.

Up the river from the Cohen Commission, another key coastal fishery on the verge of collapse was being discussed, but with no lawyers badgering witnesses. While DFO’s past ineffectiveness was condemned there as well, the fact that some DFO scientists joined in the discussion with independent scientists and First Nations was viewed as a big step forward.

Herring mismanagement causes a cultural genocide

In late August, academics, First Nations and media joined with several scientists from DFO for Simon Fraser University’s three-day research symposium (brilliantly named The Herring School Workshop) “to digest and discuss the dismal fate of herring in the Pacific Northwest.”

Michelle Washington of the Sliammon First Nations set the mood for the days ahead. With tears pouring down her cheeks, she recalled the day when a way of life—one that had endured for thousands of years—ended. She was 14 years old when the commercial fleet of herring boats arrived in front of her village bay off Skidegate. She remembers the way the boat lights lit up the bay as they fished through the night. That was in the 1950s, and the herring have never returned in numbers since.

First Nation, spoke of the intense frustrations his people had in trying to change the herring management practices in the once-vital spawning grounds of Spiller Channel. “For five years, we went to fisheries and science meetings of DFO with our own herring fishery management plan, as it is a communal aboriginal right affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada in 1996. Then we went out on to the grounds as a nation to try and stop the fishery in 2003, 2004, 2005. Canada sent in the RCMP and a paramilitary force with snipers to enforce the law. Whose law are we talking about enforcing now? The highest law in the land gave us the highest priority access. At the end of the day, the fishing fleet fished through the night and got their quota in Spiller Channel.”

Cliff Atleo, Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations, repeated a similar story about the once-rich herring spawning locations in his territory on west Vancouver Island over the last 40 years, and the specific years in which the sacro boats came and cleaned them out from Barkley to Clayoquot sounds.

Arvid Charlie of the Cowichan Tribes recounted how the herring spawns disappeared from Cowichan Bay, Genoa Bay and Gorge Harbour when he was a little boy in the ’40s from the reduction fisheries. “They came and caught the herring by the scowfuls and the herring never came back.”

“Herring have never returned in numbers since. They refused to meet me on the battlefield, opting instead to throw rocks from the bushes. They attacked my education, my Registered Professional Biologist standing, our freedom to move over the ocean freely in a boat, and the right to free speech.”

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Cliff Atleo argued that the mismanagement of herring is causing a cultural genocide of coastal people. “These are strong words but they are true, as herring are a cultural keystone species upon which all life and cultures depend.”

Frank Brown said the fact that scientists from DFO had actually come to participate was an important step in the right direction. He also acknowledged restrictions that scientists might work under because of industry interests, and said: “If we agree that herring is a keystone species, then we have to come together and try to overcome the fear around issues related to people’s employment, whether it is through allocations of herring or their jobs within the civil service.”

Research doesn’t support DFO’s assumptions

The smoking gun of the herring declines that indigenous representatives at the Herring School pointed to was the commercial fishery. First, the reduction fisheries that were closed in 1967, and then the current sac-roe fishery which kills the spawning fish.

The commercial herring fishery and processing operations are now entirely owned by Jimmy Pattison (Canfisco); and Canfisco’s senior director of fishing operations, Chris Cue, sits on advisory boards for the fishery.

At the Herring School, Dennis Chalmers, a fisheries manager all his career, first for the federal government and now at the provincial level, outlined past fisheries management, admitting the reduction fisheries were a disaster until their closure in 1967. But he defended current management practices for the sac-roe fishery. “We scientifically estimate pre-roe harvest biomass and only take 20 percent of the total, which is low by fisheries standards.” If biomass drops below a dangerous threshold in a large management section, which it has in four out of five regions, they don’t allow a fishery.

Coastal First Nations people believe that the management model used by DFO, which treats the herring population as a single, undifferentiated mass that can move around within five large management units, is too simplistic. They have been arguing for decades that herring have behaviourally distinct bay populations, differentiated by geography, migratory behaviour and/or by time of spawn. For example, there are early spawners like the Gorge and Ganges populations, and some are late, like the Cherry Point population across the Strait of Georgia—all of them on the brink of extinction.

Not paying attention to this variability in behaviour and numbers has enabled the sac-roe fleet to aggressively target each last substantive bay population to get their quota—which has remained the same percentage, despite a decline in overall biomass.

The stories from Sliammon to Haida Gwaii point to the fact that once fished out, these local bay populations fail to recover even after decades have passed, and the main cause has been the sac-roe fishery. Local populations have flickered out everywhere, even in Baynes Sound, which is still being fished by Pattison’s fleet.

However, DFO claims they haven’t found evidence that local populations are distinct, nor that the 20 percent quota of estimated biomass is a factor in the decline. Jake Schweigert, DFO herring scientist, says herring move, and he points to historical highs of the Strait of Georgia Management Unit at Baynes Sound and the Sliammon population moving around to Savary Island—although there’s been no research or catch in this section since 2000.

DFO scientists have been advocating this “moving herring” hypothesis for years, with no real evidence. And now there is new, independent evidence emerging that they’ve been wrong.

Dr Dana Lepofsky, who heads up the Herring School of researchers at SFU, has been working on the archaeology of herring for the last five years. Through excavations of village sites like Teeshoshum and Namu on the Central Coast, they have uncovered 7000 years of herring ecology and DNA in herring bones which could confirm what elders have been saying all along—that there is long-term site fidelity if these specific locations are not overfished. Abundance at these sites corresponds well to oral traditions that identify places of high concentrations of herring spawn.

Lorenz Hauser of University of Washington, Donga Yang at SFU, and Camilla Speller at University of Calgary have now figured out how to get nuclear DNA from the ancient bones and believe that this research direction might help us to better understand possible genetic differences between herring populations from place to place.

If this proves to be the case, DFO would have to accept an alternative hypothesis and embrace traditional practices—which have long been ignored but reflect this diversity. The first task, according to Arvid Charlie, would be to call for a moratorium on the herring fishery to give the last spawning groups a rest. For Karri Humchitt, Heiltsuk First Nation, the only solution is true co-management with the people who live with and understand the fish.

At the symposium, DFO’s Schweigert defended current management and suggested that declines and failure to recover are linked to many causes. But his first choice of cause was predation by growing numbers of sea lions and humpback whales, as well as climate change. When he presented this argument, there were audible gasps from the audience, one that would have fully remembered a similar argument proffered to explain the cod collapse.

They would also have recalled the 1995 muzzling of DFO scientist Ransom Myers over the causes of the cod collapse. Myers had found no evidence that predation by seals or environmental conditions were responsible for trends in total mortality of the 1985-87 cod stocks, yet his findings were removed from the pivotal Stock Status Report of 1995 and virtually none of the evidence that fishing was an important cause of the stock declines was included. When Myers spoke to the press directly in 1995 and stated categorically that the collapse of the cod fishery had nothing to do with seals and everything to do with overfishing, he was reprimanded and threatened with the loss of his job.

Many of the speakers at the Herring School Workshop knew of the Myers case and had long exposure to the problem of an industry-captured agency. So they weren’t buying Schweigert’s hypothesis.

Yet, once again, the fact that DFO scientists were participating was cited as progress. Two points of agreement were reached by the group. First, Steve Martell from DFO affirmed the criticism that there were information gaps in the old modelling and problems in making reliable stock assessments. Second, everyone agreed that in areas where
there hasn’t been any fishing for years, the herring aren’t recovering and it isn’t clear why.

But there are precious few people to answer that question. As Dr Ashleen Benson of SFU noted, Canadian science policy budgets have been cut by 40 percent and a third of the staff cut. Benson pointed out that they have 48 other species—in addition to sockeye and herring—for which stock assessments are required, but there is neither the staff nor budgets to do them. And there appears to be no political will to change the situation.

A recent example of what the federal government really cares about was their virtual scuttling—after a decade of work—of the multiple-stakeholder Pacific Northern Coast Integrated Management Area (PNCIMA), because some funding was going to come from the conservation-oriented Moore Foundation. Many believe the federal conservatives feared the agreement could negatively affect Enbridge Inc’s proposed $5.5 billion Northern Gateway pipeline.

What’s at stake

At the end of the herring symposium, Heiltsuk representative Frank Brown summed up the events and made a call for collective action. “We are in a crisis—ecological and economic. Climate change is upon us. We are all aware of the games that get played. So we have to look really long and hard in order to build a solid foundation to move forward. We need a call to action. The stocks haven’t come back. Why? Why? The question should be a collective call to action of why?”

Summing up his feelings, elder Edwin Newman said, “We have been at war with DFO for decades, but we are all at the end now. Unless we all work towards saving these stocks together, and rebuild the trust, the herring will go extinct and so will everything that depends on them, from the salmon to our cultures.”

A couple of days after her Cohen Commission appearances, Alex Morton headed out in her boat to Blackfish Sound. As she wrote in her blog, she wondered: “How could government and their lawyers be so blind to such wealth of the natural systems. Without the natural resources, BC would be poor, and yet we are destroying it so fast we will leave only the ruins to the next generation…These lawyers prevented the terrible truth from coming forward—DFO did nothing while millions of sockeye died at their feet. Fisheries were closed, salmon became scarce in some years to the people whose bodies require it. And then when one of their own stumbled on the answer to ‘Why?’ DFO prevented her from attending meetings, speaking to media, and she has no funding to work on sockeye salmon.”

One might think the devastation of the cod fishery—and the subsequent findings of lack of responsible action—would have had more impact on us and our government.


Briony Penn lives in Fulford Harbour, Salt Spring Island, where the last big spawn was 1983 and, despite local protests, charity and bait fisheries were still allowed. The wildlife have disappeared, and for her too, a way of life as a naturalist.
The wisdom of Rose

AAREN MADDEN

Coast Salish social activist Rose Henry believes homelessness in Victoria is getting worse and she wants to do something about it.

Rose Henry, a 27-year resident of Victoria, is a founder of the Victoria Committee to End Homelessness. She blogs at rosehenry.blogspot.com and homelessnation.org. At universities, churches and rallies, she speaks about poverty and human rights. She writes for and sells Victoria Street News.

The Together Against Poverty Society lists her on their board of directors, as does the BC Public Interest Advocacy Centre. BC PIAC is a nonprofit law office fighting for social justice issues ranging from foster care to poverty to human rights. Right now she’s pondering an invitation to return to the board of the Vancouver Island Human Rights Coalition. You could say she’s a little busy. She laughingly calls it “my ADHD.”

Henry is also a member of the Aboriginal Health Advisory Committee for Vancouver Women’s Health Centre, under whose purview falls Sunny Hill Health Centre. Which is some kind of justice, given the childhood years she spent there after being permanently removed from her Snuneymuxw First Nations family home.

At Sunny Hill, she was labelled mentally retarded. As an adult, she’s been labelled “protester, anarchist, First Nations Spokesperson, Homeless Advocate and professional agitator for waking people’s social conscious,” reads her BC PIAC biography. Says Henry herself, “I am just a person who is awake and cares about the world and is more than prepared to do the necessary work to improve the quality of life for everyone.” Above all, she wishes to be known as a builder of community; a destroyer of barriers.

I spotted Rose Henry as soon as I walked through the door of Victoria’s downtown library. She was sitting at a table, just to the right of the bank of public-use computers, where she used to spend hours managing all the irons in her fire. As I approach, she shakes my hand and shows me the sleek red laptop she now calls her own.

The computer was a gift from the Norwegian delegation at the International Network of Street Papers Conference she attended last July in Glasgow, Scotland, thanks to community donations that helped pay her way. She was short-listed for a Best Vendor Writing award for her article, “Economic Violence.” She didn’t win, but the computer does nicely, thanks. This day, she’d just received an email containing a photograph of her, looking radiantly upward, hands spread wide in a gesture of sharing. It’s the September cover of =Oslo, that city’s street newspaper.

The accompanying feature reveals her journey. After Sunny Hill came foster care in Powell River. Although it was a supportive environment, homelessness and addiction followed with her coming of age. She was raped and left for dead as a young woman, yet she overcame that to have a son, get an education, and rise far beyond. In 2001 she attended the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, where she sat at the same table with Nelson Mandela. She found him “humble,” and wondered at his ability to endure so much and not become bitter. The highlight, though, was meeting her idol, social justice icon Angela Davis.

Clearly, she has learned a thing or two in her 53 years on Turtle Island. One thing she knows for sure is that we won’t rise above poverty and homelessness as a society unless we all sit at the same table. If we did, all decisions could be made through the lens of multiple benefits. Says Henry, “Let’s be proud of who we are and show the world that we can take care of our own people, the homeless and social issues, and show we are the most eco-friendly community.”

There are many possibilities, but one project she saw while in Scotland stands out. She toured a farm there that ran a transition program for people being released from prisons. “One acre of land was converted into a community garden. The growers can take their produce to the local markets or even street corners,” Henry explains. Some sell the...
street news along with fresh produce and have a growing clientele. “Holy mackerel, we have Woodwynn Farms not far from here!” she enthuses, suggesting similar programs could evolve there if—and hopefully when—the facility is able to reach its full potential. Further, the city’s overtaxed soup kitchens could be supplied by Woodwynn Farms or community gardens within city limits under similar programs. The potential for building (or rebuilding) skills, health, community, food security—lives, even—is in seeing people who are homeless as intrinsic and valuable to our whole community, she says.

“The number one requirement is educating the housed about who their real neighbours are: possibly your own relatives; your own flesh and blood. They are not evil trolls living under the bridge; they are productive members of society. We need to take a step back and re-evaluate ourselves when we are judging a person based on where they are living. And that is both ways: the homeless need to re-evaluate who they are looking at, too.” Neither is the enemy, Henry insists.

Once that happens, the possibilities are endless. Henry envisions the City solving social problems with a creative and integrated approach that actively includes the people experiencing poverty and homelessness in every civic endeavour. Take the Johnson Street Bridge. Its huge expense and controversy has pulled the focus off of the poverty and homelessness issues Mayor Dean Fortin was elected to address, but which she believes have grown worse. “It’s kind of a thorn in my side, but decisions have been made,” Henry concedes of the bridge issue, even while finding ways to realign the project to greater goals.

“Let’s have a guarantee that the companies that are going to build this bridge hire local people. Let’s even say five percent of the people employed are living in poverty or homeless. Let’s ensure that when the lunch wagon comes along, it’s a local food supply. Let’s have some give and take,” she urges.

With those and many other ideas in mind, Henry has set her sights on a seat at one particular table. For the fourth time, she will be running for City Council in November’s election. She’d like to think “the city of Victoria is ready to break with tradition and take the risk and elect someone like me into City Hall; to see me as a councillor with the strength and tenacity to stick with whatever issues are tossed my way.” (In 2008 she got 3372 votes, placing 11th, with eight councillors elected.)

As we part, she summarizes her raison d’être: “I have a saying about Victoria. We have to restore unity back into community and understand homeless people are just homeless, not worthless. And if we work together as a team, as a family, in the end we are all going to benefit.”

Aaren Madden learned much from Rose Henry, including the fact that in 150 years, Victoria has never had a First Nations city councillor. And that Turtle Island is the non-colonial name for North America.

How about lymphatic, aggrieved, isolationist? Several months ago the Times Colonist ran an editorial entitled “Making rezoning pay for public.” The TC quotes a neighbour of a proposed development: “If they get 12 storeys, what do we [the community] get?” The editorial continues: “That’s a question every municipal council should be asking before approving rezoning applications…Rezoning approvals generally increase the value of a property. Councils often seek, or are offered, benefits in return for rezoning…But without accurate information, councils can’t strike the best deal for the public.”

Developers—if I may borrow from Conrad—have taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land.

I don’t want to pull you all the way down the rabbit hole on the subject of zoning, but I do want to establish here, as context for the theme of this month’s sermon on the area known as Rock Bay, that zoning is about as rational as religious faith and subject to the same logic as the parental “Why? Because I said so!”

The 20th century opened with “smoke-stack” industrial practices (including everybody’s favourites: whale flensing and dumping coal tar), and closed with the total transformation of industrial business activities, loci and markets. Hey, guess what, there’s no more local industry, so small wonder that many industrial areas in urban settings are in a functional transition and ready to change with the times, but are still trapped in an outmoded definition of industry and long-ago zoning, and burdened with a civic eye blind to the special costs of contamination cleanup or the unique challenges and risks of developing properties in a transitioning ex-industrial frontier.

This is understandable in part because areas don’t necessarily stop being what they were on some January first. Transitions can be slow and evolutionary, and there are often viable holdover activities with legitimate industrial agendas regarding land use, and a lot of political clout and megaphonic moral leverage. This traps planners and politicians who want never to be on the wrong side of the little baby Jesus jobs-and-industry argument (the local mantra in Victoria is working harbour, working harbour).


Rock Bay—the sizable area north of downtown bounded approximately by Chatham Street, the south side of Bay Street, the harbour on the west, and Blanshard Street on the east—was home a century ago to tanneries, a coal
Many industrial areas in urban settings are in a functional transition and ready to change with the times, but are still trapped in an outmoded definition of industry and long-ago zoning.

While the wisest thing might have been to turn the area over to the Japanese to use as a toxic monster movie set, various civic leaders—elected and otherwise—have cast an eye north periodically and seen the gleam not of chemical stew, but of opportunity.

Folks think of the current Rock Bay as industrial—light, heavy, or a mix of both. An hour-long meander up and down its roughly 16 square blocks reveals a finer-grained reality. There is still the old house here and there, mostly uphill of Douglas Street toward Blanshard—some occupied residentially, others appropriated by adjacent service businesses. There’s a lot of warehousing and truck unloading, auto-related repair and servicing, motels, commercial offices, an incredible amount of paved surface, a Dairy Queen, numerous shops, a condo development. In fact, Rock Bay contains everything from redi-mix concrete plants to a love shop—soup to nuts, you might say.

St. Vincent de Paul has a big operation here. So does Budget Rent-a-Car vehicle sales (though rumours are swirling that owner Judy Scott has sold the property to BC Transit for some future transit infrastructure). There are large, vacant properties scattered here and there, and behind temporary screening, BC Hydro and the feds are involved in a $40-million cleanup of the large, almost seven-acre, contaminated site around the old power plant. There’s chatter that Ian Maxwell, owner of Point Hope Shipyard and Ralmax, has his sights set on a watery indentation close to Bay and Government Streets as a future site for additional construction materials barging and handling.

While an industrial ecology may have occupied large portions of Rock Bay in past times, industrial activity now exists mostly west of Government Street and takes the simpler...
(and hardly job-intensive) form of an asphalt operation two blocks north of Capital Iron, and the concrete batch plants and ever-shifting hills of construction aggregate that claim almost all of the water’s edge along Bay Street. Smith Brothers Foundry and Machine Works maintains its operation on Princess Street between Government and Douglas. If you want to stretch the definition of “industrial,” Vancouver Island Brewery operates a bottling plant on Government Street, near Bay Street, and there is a major recycling operation on a side-street.

Let’s face it: Rock Bay looks like crap, has no coherent identity, and is a stretch of urban crud between the northern reaches of downtown and the Oz of automotive sales and servicing north of Bay Street. Rock Bay is like the sitcom closet out of which falls unwashed laundry, month-old pizza, shoeboxes, a tennis racquet, suitcases, a stuffed owl and a tuba.

It does have some things going for it, though. First, it’s a bowl sloping from every compass point toward the harbour—there are fabulous south-westerly views to be capitalized on. Second, it’s close to downtown and, assuming the Hudson makes good on its supermarket boast, close to food. Third, it’s a relatively unpainted canvas and is crying out for new, brilliant urbanism. Fourth, in spite of claims of a red-hot market for industrial land, the Rock Bay property market remains moribund. Rock Bay land use is all over the place, suggesting that future zoning for multi-use would simply expand and capitalize on, not frustrate, the area’s current DNA.

Victoria Mayor Dean Fortin, without being too specific, has put forward a vision linking Rock Bay’s future to “jobs,” hinting that an efflorescence of tech business would be a welcome outcome. The Downtown Victoria Community Alliance, during its Downtown 2020 conferences, a few years back, speculated that Rock Bay might, alongside other uses, become the home of thousands of new residents feeding the downtown economy and animating its streets. For its part, the city, during its recent renovation of the Downtown Plan, extended downtown’s planning umbrella to include the entire Rock Bay area, but didn’t move downtown’s official boundaries northwards. (Like the most attentive of lovers, the city was sensitive to the feelings of the Gorge-Burnside neighbourhood who uses the Rock Bay body count in its claim for municipal goodies.) The City has yet to define a vision for Rock Bay or frame its land use potentials. With the exception of council, who all sing a rousing chorus of “working harbour, working harbour,” no land use narrative has taken hold.

And there it sits.

When folks try to understand the mind of the developer, they often fail because they make the mistake of imagining that developers are complex, textured, charitable, nuanced, able to embrace ambiguity—that is, human. But to get an accurate picture, you have to zoom in from mammalian consciousness, through reptilian consciousness, to plant or single-celled organism consciousness. There is only one elemental life force beating out a tattoo within the developer’s being: Risk…reward. Risk…reward. Lub…dub. Food…eat. Air…breathe. Water…drink. Risk…reward.

Then you have the City of Victoria, infected by apparently incurable bunny-itis, playing the Mr Bill role (Google it if you’re under 40) in the planning/zoning/development process: “So remember, kids, the developer is your friend, and he will always clean up contaminated sites for free and provide park space, community amenities and affordable housing funds. Isn’t that big cement truck a little close to me? Ohhhhh noooooo!”

It approaches the cringe-worthy to observe Victorians responding to the words “appropriate” and “scaled” and it’s an outright x-rated experience to witness how they make them cuddle: “appropriately scaled” and “scaled appropriately.” Unfortunately, there are two tall, dark strangers which “appropriate” and “scaled” have never met in their travels: “risk management” and “financially viable.”

You can hear the idea expressed around City Hall that the City prefers not to “intervene in the marketplace.” But this is baloney. The City is a vast intervener and player in the marketplace—with every zoning decision and every development cost charge and every site- or area-specific capital expenditure having an economic consequence, and arbitrarily showering value and opportunity throughout the marketplace. (In this context, it’s useful to know that downtown commercial vacancies are up and retail register sales are down. The reverse is true in the suburbs.)

I appreciate that Victoria has a genius for inertia and that this talent happens not by accident, but intention. I understand that downtown has been volunteered (some would say sacrificed) to prove the virtues of caution and immobility in a scary, jumpy world. I get the nuanced messages behind the stance: memory is a safe refuge; pride (or its Victorian simulacrum, height) cometh before the fall; love of change is just cloaked hunger for novelty…itsel folly; when in doubt, tend your garden and mend your gate; and so on. In a moment of meditative insight it comes to me that Downtown is just social theatre in which these beliefs merge into a female expression or personification of the city; and that really what Victoria endlessly, ceremonially recapitulates is a rejection of the wiggly, spartic ritual of “The Modern”—like Michael Moorcock’s Gloriana, the Unfulfill’d Queen (the frigid queen seeks satisfaction but cannot trust herself to love; and upon her shoulders, she believes, rests the responsibility to ensure that civilization does not descend into darkness and madness); or Tennyson’s “Princess”:

Not peace she look’d, the Head: but rising up
Robed in the long night of her deep hair, so
To the open window moved, remaining there
Fist like a beacon-tower above the waves
Of tempest, when the crimson-rolling eye
Glares ruin and the wild birds on the light
Dash themselves dead. She stretch’d her arms and call’d
Across the tumult and the tumult fell.

But every Victoria, including our own, must respond to the shifting future, including the scary bits. All this desperate, tight control is bad for health: it gives the city cancer. The future comes knocking, even if you’re hiding in your shell. So, let’s pose an open question: in Rock Bay can market realities and City policies ever commingle, merge, conjoin; or, to take things down from the imagery of hot, raw sex to holy matrimony, at least create a productive collaboration?
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Certainly the most surprising of them all to go viral, though, would have to be 63-year-old Gabriola Island visual artist and animator Paul Grignon’s *Money as Debt*. It’s an independently-made 47-minute video lecture on our current system for creating money. Yet Grignon has now sold over 12,000 copies of it on DVD, while it’s been (mostly illegally) copied and resold, uploaded, and translated so widely that by Grignon’s last estimation it was in 24 languages, appearing or being discussed on thousands of websites, and surpassing two million viewers. It’s been endorsed by the Canadian Action Party and the American Monetary Institute, ex-managers of Wall Street investment firms, and prominent economists like David Korten and Hazel Henderson. It’s also been heavily promoted by Elizabeth Kucinich, along with her more famous husband, congressman and former US Democratic presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich, and used at rallies for current Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul.

What accounts for its surprising popularity?

“I like to think it’s because it’s good,” suggests Grignon, chuckling. “It’s simple, and even though it’s about serious stuff, it’s still kind of fun to watch...I wanted to keep it simple enough so that children would understand it. Or at least keep them interested. But deep enough that it was true.”

It’s not really the kind of fare you can pop into the TV to keep rowdy kids distracted for an hour, yet Grignon’s hand-drawn and computer-animated cartoon and effective use of a variety of storytelling techniques do make this esoteric topic at once more understandable and politically compelling.

The film’s opening image is of a figure cloaked like an apparition of Death, hammering away ineffectively at a giant Debt to which his ankle is chained. The straightforward narrative is then brought to life with moving flowcharts and diagrams, visual analogies, theatrical anecdotes with recognizable characters in familiar financial situations, and provocative quotations that take on ever more disturbing significance as the film progresses, like that of 18th century German banker Mayer Anselm Rothschild: “Permit me to issue and control the money of a nation, and I care not who makes its laws.”

The most effective interplay of all these elements occurs in an eight-minute sequence called “The Goldsmith’s Tale,” the original seed for the film.

Grignon was commissioned in 2002 by a now-defunct activist group to create a video from a five-hour seminar about fraudulent lending practices, and prefaced it with this animated short. Soon, monetary reform activists from across the political spectrum were asking for more. Inspired, he began consulting with experts and by 2006 he was putting in 12 to 20-hour days for six straight months to complete the full-length version of *Money as Debt*.

The Goldsmith’s Tale begins with early trading between indigenous peoples and telescopes hundreds of years of economic and cultural development into the story of a single village of alternately

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**This artist follows the money**

ROB WIPOND

Paul Grignon has struck a popular nerve with his cartoon exposé of a financial system that’s exacerbating our public debt spiral and hastening descent into environmental destruction.

By now most of us have heard about at least a few of the local people who’ve “made it big” in the world of online viral videos. Victoria writer Andrew Struthers’ two-minute spoof based on the Canadian Wildlife Service’s “Hinterland Who’s Who” commercials, “Spiders on Drugs,” is the undisputed champion, currently nearing 30 million views on YouTube. More typically, other area folk have garnered tens or hundreds of thousands of hits for a beautiful folk song, a recording of a police assault downtown, and one of the biggest lip-sync gatherings in the world (I don’t know of any popular videos of local babies or pets doing especially adorable things, but there are likely a few of those, too).
curious, grateful and suspicious townspeople and one highly crafty money-lender. Along the way, various key aspects of modern banking become much more understandable.

We learn how banks manage to loan out much more money than they technically have. And we learn how those same loans turn around to become leverageable bank assets and deposits; that is, how my written promise to a bank to repay a loan—my debt—“creates” new money.

And finally the film explores how having turned this power of money creation over to the private sector is now generating seemingly insurmountable problems for our governments. What happens when we’ve built a financial system that’s dependent on taking out loans and generating debt to private banks in order to keep money flowing? What happens when we have an economy that’s dependent on ever-accelerating growth to pay off those ever-growing debts with their ever-compounding interest?

This is where the cleverness of Grignon’s approach becomes evident. Even though the film has gained some blogger critics for its confusing moments, brow-furrowing shortcuts, and ultimately anti-establishment message, overall, much of its content parallels what can be readily found (if not as easily comprehended) in educational publications like the US Federal Reserve’s *Modern Money Mechanics*. However, consistently describing our society and entire banking system as if in a children’s story about “one small community” with one or two banks, much of the mysticism in complex exchanges can be bypassed or more simply explained, and we see the precarious situation we’re actually in.

By the time the credits roll, it’s difficult not to feel as if all other progressive social and environmental activism should play second fiddle to reforming our monetary system. After viewing it myself, I promptly began researching more, helped found Transition Victoria’s Economy Working Group, deluged the City of Victoria’s economic strategy with input, and started wondering how we could pull ourselves out of the global financial system and survive.

According to Grignon, that was the very reason he made the video. “I used to be more oriented towards environmental concerns,” he says. Still today, his visual art is dominated with affectionate portrayals of trees, whales, birds, beaches, shorelines and other natural West Coast imagery. “We live in a beautiful place. My art just celebrates it.”

However, Grignon’s research into “peak oil” kept leading him ever deeper into the ways our modern financial system and economy ultimately put increasing pressure on our planet’s inherent limits.

“You find out that the money system is based on perpetual growth. So how are you going to win any of the other battles related to growth?” he asks. “It’s like having water running downhill at you. You can’t possibly get uphill without stopping the water. And the money system is like this constant need for growth. Exponential growth at all costs.”

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GRIGNON HAS NOW SOLD over 12,000 copies of *Money as Debt* on DVD, while it’s been (mostly illegally) copied and resold, uploaded, and translated so widely that by Grignon’s last estimation it was in 24 languages, appearing or being discussed on thousands of websites, and surpassing two million viewers.
Nevertheless, says Grignon, he wasn’t interested in making another gloomy movie about impending doom to help foment panic. “I didn’t want to induce more fear. I don’t see how that’s useful. Just understand it. Understand how it works now. Understand how we could make it work differently.”

The recent international financial collapses, he says—which Grignon explores in a sequel but were presciently predicted in his first film—are a piercing siren call for the danger we’re in.

“Banks just created money and debt that was irresponsible debt that couldn’t be repaid,” he says. When homeowners began defaulting, the banks didn’t have anywhere near enough money to cover those loans they’d made and we were all threatened with financial chaos. “Taxpayers are now on the hook for the loss of money that banks never had in the first place.”

That private debt hasn’t gone away, of course; it’s simply become public debt. “It can’t go on,” says Grignon. “The system is broken.”

It certainly stretches the imagination to grapple with the question of how much longer we can go with the average Canadian now supposedly carrying over $41,000 in debt, doubling since 1989. Our collective government debt then piles on another $37,000 per person. Then add in business debts. And we all have to work harder, produce more, sell more, and use more resources to pay off those debts. And lately, of course, whenever waves of debtors crack, we’re also being called on to bail out the very banks that hold these debts, because the banks never truly had that money to lend in the first place. (It’s not often widely discussed that, in fact, our federal government did bail out Canadian banks in 2008 to the tune of—depending on whose analysis you can get your head around—somewhere between $25 and $265 billion in risky mortgages. Even at the lower end, this is an amount not terribly dissimilar to the US bailout, considering the relative sizes of our respective federal budgets and banking sectors.)

So our governments are now borrowing more and becoming even more indebted to private banks, and constantly selling new government bonds to help pay the interest on the old bonds and keep themselves afloat for a little longer. “If anybody else would do it, it would be called a Ponzi Scheme and they’d go to jail,” points out Grignon.

It’s the same accusation The Economist made last year, when they calculated most wealthy countries were now carrying debts two to three times their GDPs.

And as more governments frantically turn to cutting back services and selling off public assets as another way of paying down debts, Grignon notes, “We’re heading back to the feudal system where the lords own everything, people own nothing...That [debt] cannot just keep getting bigger and bigger and bigger without breaking the back of the debtor. It’s a path to ecological and social suicide.”

—Paul Grignon

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But haven’t we managed to bumble through successive major bank collapses and debt crises in Europe and North America, and we’re still standing? “It’s gone a lot further than I thought it would,” concedes Grignon. “It’s not changing my mind; it’s just more resilient than you think.”

And besides, he points out, we only have to look outside a handful of buttressed financial forts to know that everything is not peachy. “A lot of the world collapsed a long time ago.” He adds, “If you’re using a money system that is a path to suicide, one would think the smart idea would be to change the money system. But that isn’t even on most people’s radar.”

Grignon believes we need to start moving towards an alternative exchange system “beyond money” that supports direct trade between people, with less need for mediation from banks, loans, credit cards or cash—something he explores in his comple-
Graham Robertson and Tamara Dean

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d

ocal massage therapist Graham Robertson got his introduction to fundraising when a friend and colleague died of cancer last summer. A shaved head and $1600 in donations sparked him into a further interest in fundraising. While brainstorming with friends about potential charities, two of his friends told him that when they had lost their mothers, Victoria Hospice was not only amazing, but it had kept them sane. His interest piqued, Graham says, “I researched and it sounded like the right cause. That was enough to get me motivated.” Plans for his “Cycle of Life” were underway.

On July 24, Graham flew to Anchorage, Alaska. The next morning he was on his bike, pedalling for a worthy cause. A month later, 3600 kilometres of road behind him, he arrived home to Victoria. He says, “It was the hardest thing I have ever done.”

Graham originally set $10,000 as his goal, but reached $13,000, well on his way to his new long-term goal of raising $50,000 for Hospice. Money came from three major sources—a silent auction of items donated from local sponsors, individual donations, and from Graham’s own Massage for a Cause, where he offers massages one Sunday a month at Acacia Integrative Health Clinic, and donates all of the day’s fees to a charity. From February to July this year, that money all went towards his “Cycle of Life.”

Volunteers at the hospices he visited along his route—in Whitehorse, Prince George, Quesnel and 100 Mile House—not only inspired him, but they also planted the idea to make the ride an annual event.

“One of the most exciting ways to help Victoria Hospice is to host your own fundraiser, as Graham, Amber and Brett did. From a small tea party to a large golf tournament or anything in between, what makes it great is you can be as creative as you want!”

—Tamara Dean

“I’ve got a mission,” he now says as he talks about his plan to support his friend Sean Jacklin, who will ride across Canada next summer to continue the good work of “The Cycle of Life.”

Tamara Dean, in charge of Corporate and Community Relations at Victoria Hospice, emphasizes the importance of third-party gifts such as Graham’s, explaining that only 50 percent of their annual operating costs are covered by the healthcare system. She is especially excited about recent fund-raising events such as Graham’s, as well as the “Bump…Set…Support! Beach Volleyball Tournament” organized by Amber Weber and “Soccer is the Answer to Cancer” organized by Brett Hyslop, because each event was organized by young people who are interested in making them annual events.

“One of the most exciting ways to help Victoria Hospice is to host your own fundraiser, as Graham, Amber and Brett did,” says Tamara. “From a small tea party to a large golf tournament or anything in between, what makes it great is you can be as creative as you want!”

Individuals or groups interested in organizing their own event to benefit Victoria Hospice are invited to contact Tamara directly or visit www.VictoriaHospice.org where they will find ideas, pledge forms and tax receipt information. As Tamara says, “We want to make sure the event is a success, and so we want to help.”

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Give online at www.VictoriaHospice.org

Rob Wipond invites economic researchers to add to this discussion at www.focusonline.ca. He can be reached at rob@robwipond.com.

www.focusonline.ca • October 2011
Living country in the city

In some ways, country living in Victoria is better than the real thing.

My large family includes just two urbanites: A sister in Toronto and me, here in Victoria. My sister in Toronto—God love her, as the elders in our hometown would say in solace—has been trying to escape to rural Prince Edward Island for years. I, on the other hand, have been living country on my standard suburban lot for almost two decades.

I haven’t always realized this, since my ideal country vignette once included a winding lane flanked by an old apple orchard on one side and on the other a field for placid, cud-grinding cows with eyes half-closed as if in the trance of some delightful herbivorous reverie. Victoria was definitely not country, in my mind. But then we planted a vegetable garden and several trees, added a gazebo, and tucked in a couple of bird baths. Up and down the street, saplings matured and houses began relinquishing their dominance on the landscape. Presto—well, maybe not “presto,” but suddenly, it seemed—we were in the country.

Victoria is a dynamic combination of urban and rural, the best of both worlds in many ways. On the Galloping Goose Trail, I can cycle to farms in Saanich or the downtown core in 30 minutes. The Goose and other trails offer safe hiking and biking throughout the city. On some sections you’d swear you were deep in the wilderness.

In the country you can buy super-fresh food straight from the farmer. In Victoria you can too, either from a farm stand just a few kilometres “up the road” or at one of several local markets around town. Other home-grown products also abound. One of my neighbours sells the most gorgeous dahlia bouquets I’ve ever seen.

I grew up on a farm surrounded by fields that were perfect for walking and pondering. Now I find rural solitude at the local park, just a five-minute stroll away. These days I’m also finding blackberries there, so many that the whole neighbourhood could pick unrestricted and still there’d be a million sweet jewels left dangling on the bramble. Parks and nature sanctuaries provide needed nectar for the body and soul. Fortunately we have so many in the region that walking to one is an option from most homes in Greater Victoria.

Backyard chickens, now allowed under new bylaws, further infuse a rural ambience, although we’ve always been an animal-loving city. Everyone has a dog, it seems, and the pastoral peninsula is dotted with cows, horses and the occasional sheep, pig or llamas. Those wanting a closer encounter can visit the Beacon Hill Petting Zoo, or sit on their own front porch and watch roaming herds of semi-feral deer decimate the delphiniums. Okay, that last bit was a tad sarcastic. A deer in the distance is cute but even the real rural folks would find three in the garden highly intolerable.

Our clean air is pure country as well. Thanks to the city’s ample green space and near-complete absence of heavy industry, we have the luxury of breathing easy, a blessing that’s never more apparent than when returning from a trip to almost anywhere else. Many cities have grown so large that the insidious smog from industry and traffic pollutes far beyond their own perimeters, tainting rural enclaves that are, ironically, their own most important breadbasket.

(Memo to ourselves: We can’t afford to ignore our own growing transportation issues, and our search for solutions must not be appropriated by partisan interests and their push for expensive, piecemeal fixes.)

In some ways, country living in Victoria is better than the real thing. Our heritage homes are in better shape and probably more plentiful: In James Bay you can find whole eye-popping rows of them standing shoulder to shoulder behind cheerful cottage gardens. The internet service is reliable, and schools, hospitals and libraries are just minutes away. A trip to the dentist or night on the town does not have to be preceded by an hour’s drive. Getting groceries isn’t an all-day event.

It’s pretty darn easy living the country lifestyle. Taking care of our city will keep it that way.

While writing this article Trudy Duivenvoorden Mitic harvested food from her garden, bolstered the deer fence and read a Harrowsmith primer on raising chickens.
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Hearth Eco Home brings decades of design experience to play in a gallery-like space for ecologically-oriented decor.