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Rocky Point Bird Observatory hosts monthly bird walks at Saanich’s Outerbridge Park on the 2nd Sunday of each month at 9 am.

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This notice made possible by Marlene Russo, lawyer and mediator

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The last strategic vote

LESLEI CAMPBELL

Let’s make sure that next time we can vote our conscience and know it will count.

As I was working out the details of how I would get my mom, Jade, to the polls on election day, her careworker Cristina asked if there might be trouble. Trouble? What do you mean, I asked. She told me how the Philippines had often had trouble with “flying voters”—referring to electoral fraud where people are paid to get on lists illegally and vote a certain way. Well, there might be some robocalls misdirecting people to the wrong polls, but as far as I know, no “flying voters.” She also wondered, would it be safe? Yes, of course, I answered. In her homeland, she explained, there had been “ambushes” around election time. Which led me to recall another caregiver, one who’d come from an agency to help over the weekend. Also from the Philippines, she’d told me that her husband had been shot and killed because he was seeking election as mayor of his town.

Thankfully, even with unwavering resolution on the part of so many to “Stop Harper,” ambushes and assassinations were not among Canadians’ strategies. Instead, we engaged in all sorts of non-violent, legal means to “heave Steve.” And though we whined about the extraordinary campaign period imposed by Harper, it worked against him in the end, as the Liberal wave gathered strength in the latter half of the campaign.

Among our best strategies were simply encouraging more people to vote. Everyone got into the act. In a grocery store on election day, I listened as a cashier asked everyone who came through her till if they had voted and she gave them lots of praise if they had. The mass get-out-the-vote movement worked. There was a seven percent jump nationally in voter turn-out—at 68.49 percent, the highest since 1993. Locally, it was even more impressive with a whopping 73 to 80 percent turn-out in the various ridings.

We also became overly familiar with the refrain “vote strategically.” I for one will be very happy if there’s no need for it in the next federal election.

While the strategic vote chorus helped us all understand the way the first-past-the-post system is unfair to the electorate—allowing one party to have a majority government despite 60 percent voting for other parties—it also added an element of confusion, especially when polls showed close races between non-Conservatives.

Its purpose was to unite us in order to defeat Harper, but ironically, in some communities, the pleas to vote for a candidate you didn’t want to in order to accomplish Harper’s banishment seemed more divisive than uniting. Perhaps in a few ridings it made sense. But it seemed contagious, spreading in ways the organizers didn’t intend—like in Victoria where there was no chance of electing a Conservative. And even in the ridings officially targeted by groups like Leadnow, it often didn’t work out well. In BC, where Leadnow made specific recommendations in 13 ridings, four of those went sideways, though only two of them ended up with a Conservative winning. In both North Okanagan-Shushwap and Cariboo-Prince George, Leadnow urged people to vote NDP, but the Liberals were the ones who ended in second place, leaving the Conservatives to win. Strategic voting is more art than science.

The “Anyone But Conservative” movement seemed at times an excuse to offer endorsements for a particular party. In Burnaby North-Seymour, No Tanker’s Ben West endorsed the NDP candidate despite that party not being committed to stopping Kinder Morgan’s pipeline. Understandably, the Green candidate, scientist Lynne Quarmby, who’d been arrested over the pipeline and had worked alongside Ben West, felt betrayed and perplexed. How did it work out there—besides the bruises? The Liberals won hands-down—and they were polling ahead, so why endorse the NDP or anyone?

Environmentalist Tzeptorah Berman, like Leadnow, endorsed Mira Oreck (NDP) in Vancouver Granville. That was despite some polls showing the Liberals were in a clear lead and others showing a tie. In the end, Liberal Jody Wilson-Raybould won with a whopping 23,643 votes—9000 more than either her Conservative or NDP competitor. The seat was saved from Harper’s Conservatives, but Leadnow and Berman were proven wrong and unhelpful.

Here in Victoria, some NDPers displayed—in Facebook posts and in public—resentment towards the Green Party for simply having the audacity to run a strong candidate. While the NDP’s Murray Rankin won the intensely-fought Victoria race, the Green Party more than tripled its vote over the 2011 election—moving from 7000 to over 23,500 votes. The NDP had 30,679 votes in 2011 but dipped to 30,147 this time, despite 11,000 more voters coming to the polls. The Green’s Jo-Ann Roberts picked up a good portion of those votes. The Conservative vote went down by close to 6000 votes, ending at 8423; and the Liberals, despite the candidate’s ambiguous status, maintained about 8000 votes in each election. The Conservatives had no hope of winning the riding, and neither did the Liberals. So voters had to choose between two progressive candidates, neither of which had any real hope of forming government. We could afford to vote our conscience with no fear of helping Harper form government again.

It’s a great relief that we can now jettison both “Stop Harper” and “vote strategically.”

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT HARPER is gone. And Prime Minister Designate Trudeau seems genuinely committed to ditching the first-past-the-post system that brought both Harper and himself to power. The Liberal platform promised a special, all-party parliamentary committee to study alternatives to the current electoral system, and, within 18 months, to introduce legislation to replace first-past-the-post, based on the committee’s recommendations. Trudeau reiterated this promise the morning after the election.
Still, we must stand on guard. Other powerful people in the Liberal Party may lobby hard to not rock the boat. After all, Trudeau has a comfortable majority (54.4 percent of the seats) with only 39.5 percent of the people voting for him. (Sounds familiar, doesn’t it?) Under the electoral reforms that will be considered, he’d have ended up with a minority government. Over the decades, parties have been highly reluctant to change the system that brought them a majority.

But let’s think positively, or at least be vigilantly optimistic.

In the next year and a half we’ll no doubt be learning more about the various forms of electoral systems, chief among them proportional representation. Close to 100 countries around the world use different forms of “pro-rep” and academics have done much research on them. There’s Mixed Member Proportionality (MMP) used in New Zealand, Germany, and Scotland; and the one we almost got in BC a few years back, Single Transferable Vote (STV), used in Australia, Ireland, and India. But right now the important thing to remember is they all allow every vote to count in shaping parliament. If your preferred party gets 20 percent of the votes, then it will get 20 percent of seats in the House of Commons. (In this election, nationally, the NDP’s 19.7 percent of the popular vote translated to only 13 percent of the seats.)

On Vancouver Island, what might that look like? Well it’s hard to forecast from the recent popular vote because it probably has been influenced by the “vote strategically” message and different types of pro-rep would play out slightly differently. But say it was representative and say we still had at least five seats from the Island. The 33 percent of us who voted NDP would likely get two seats, but the 21 percent of us who voted Liberal or Conservative (each), and the 24 percent of us who voted Green would all see one of their party’s candidates elected to the House of Commons. There’d be a far greater possibility for smaller parties and even independent candidates to do well.

Kelly Carmichael, executive director of Fair Vote Canada, pointed out that under the current system, “Over 9 million [51 percent] Canadians didn’t get to vote in a representative in this election.” As the organization’s electoral expert Wilfred Day told DeSmogblog, “the winner-takes-all voting system is the ultimate voter suppression scheme: It throws 51 per cent of the votes in the garbage.”

Pro-rep electoral systems often result in minority governments, meaning there’s far more collaboration forced upon our parliamentarians.

So, while Trudeau and his Liberals have a lot on their plate (e.g. climate talks in December, 25,000 Syrian refugees welcomed by 2016…), his promises around electoral reform are crucial for the health of our democracy.

Next election, if Trudeau keeps his promise, we’ll all be able to vote our conscience because every vote will count towards the results. Hyper-partisanship will be diminished because the stakes won’t be quite so high. And strategic voting will die a good death.

Hopefully Cristina herself will be able to vote. On election day, she completed her application for permanent residency, a step towards citizenship and getting her husband and son to Canada. Which reminds me of another of Trudeau’s encouraging promises—to help reunite immigrant families.
An absence of evidence

Great article by David Broadland on the sewage plant and evidence-based decision making. Unlike many opinion pieces, you actually name names, particularly Murray Rankin’s. Good for you!

I have been an opponent of the sewage plant pretty much from day one and particularly from the point that I read the SETAC Report which acknowledged there was no science behind the decision. Yes, it did weakly endorse the project, saying we should do it anyway to improve our image, and—really big arm-wave here—because sometime in the future when the population increases the ocean-based system might actually have a real problem with polluting the marine environment.

As much as I oppose the waste of $1 billion, I disagree with you that the federal government is the main culprit here. After the contamination of drinking water by sewage in Walkerton Ontario, the federal government correctly undertook a comprehensive review of sewage regulations. Their process was actually quite thorough, scientific and open. Yes, the final regulations were a one size fits all; that’s how governments work. But given that the objective of the regulations was to ensure safe drinking water, Victoria had a very good case to make for an exemption (including on scientific grounds regarding the distance from the outfall at which the sewage concentration was measured). No one representing Victoria at any government level has ever asked the feds for an exemption.

The real villain was Gordon Campbell and his successor Christy Clark and her government. Campbell was the one who ordered Victoria to build land-based treatment long before the new federal regulations came out. His reason was to suck up to Washington State’s governor (as the Seattle media have always harped about us flushing our sewage into the Strait) in the furtherance of his dream of an eco-friendly corridor down the West Coast to California where one could drive his or her electric car without worrying about finding a recharging station. This dream was to be his historical legacy. He now has quite a different legacy, but unfortunately the sewage project lives on.

Sharing in the ignominy for this totally wasteful use of public money are every mayor and councillor in the Greater Victoria region since 2010 who have also ignored the science and have failed to push back against the Province, and instead have just gone along with the project saying we (local governments) don’t have any choice. Of course they had a choice! They could have commissioned a referendum; they could have agreed to a thorough environmental review. And particularly after the Province signalled that it wouldn’t override municipal decision-making, they could have just passed the ball back to the Province and told it that if it wants a plant, then it can build one, we’re not!

Maybe in the end the bridge fiasco will be enough to scare the local and provincial pols to avoid a much much bigger fiasco by pushing ahead with land-based sewage treatment. I can only hope!

Mike Day

Salmon resurgence

In reference to Maleea Acker’s article in October’s Focus, it is fair to say that Greater Victoria has the best coastal and marine environment in urban Canada, no exaggeration.

It becomes clear when you look at the whole package: whales, seals, fishes, birds, clam beds, trees, rare plants, kelp forests, eelgrass beds and all, from Ten Mile Point and the Oak Bay archipelago to Race Rocks and Rocky Point.

Victoria Harbour Migratory Bird Sanctuary is part of this package—Pacific great blue heron, marbled murrelet, harlequin ducks and all. Interestingly, this historic sanctuary is largely unknown to the public and remains without proper signage from Portage Inlet to Oak Bay and Ten Mile Point.

The health of Greater Victoria’s environment could be a lot better if we manage to bring Pacific herring back to our region, the land of the Lekwungen (Songhees and Esquimalt), the land of the smoked herring. The herring recovery programme in Howe Sound/Squamish, for example, is massively instructive and inspiring.

We are grateful to the CRD’s Gorge Waterway Initiative and other groups and restoration projects for their relentless efforts. Yes, this is a positive CRD story.

Jacques Sirois, Chair,
Friends of Victoria Harbour Migratory Bird Sanctuary

Randall Garrison’s claim in Maleea Acker’s October 2015 article that the federal government “stripped protection from every watershed on Vancouver Island” is false. The reality is that laws remain that can be used. What the government did was simplify regulations applicable to “navigation,” which is what the law is for.

Randall Garrison is prone to making false claims about species, as are those who worship the very common Garry oak tree (which grows south into northern California, according to Canada’s COSEWIC list and SARA database). Garry oaks here are at the northern limit of viability. They are rare on the lower mainland, which is further north with some difference in climate from here.

I’d like Maleea Acker to comment on the effect of blocking passage of salmon up the
Colquitz during the night for the convenience of counters who want short hours. Do fish travel at night? Are they stressed by a solid barrier instead of being able to duck into a bay or slow spot and rest?

Keith Sketchley

Maleea Acker comments:
The Navigable Waters Protection Act (NWPA) provided federal oversight for any water body capable of carrying a water-borne vessel. The new Navigable Protection Act provides federal oversight to only 163 lakes, oceans and (portions of) rivers. It is true, though, that the NWPA changes were not the sole basis for the loss of environmental protection for our waters; that happened when the Conservative government weakened the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act during bill C-38. According to Canadian Science Publishing, before this bill any proposed development on a water body covered by the NWPA triggered an environmental assessment. Under the new legislation, assessment occurs only if the type of construction is listed on the “designated projects list.” The new navigation act allows for construction of pipelines, dams, bridges and other industrial development on many waterways without having to notify the government. Waterways that were previously protected are now vulnerable, including many on the Northern Gateway pipeline route.

Those who “worship” Garry oak trees would better be labelled as those who care for a complex ecosystem that includes those oak trees, which are but one species in a severely endangered ecosystem on the south island. If the Royal BC Museum’s climate change predictions are correct, in a few short decades the Garry oak could be one of the only trees left standing in this area as summer droughts become more prolonged and savannah ecosystems begin to replace our current coniferous forests.

As for the reader’s question, most Coho migrate upstream during daylight hours. Volunteer fish counters keep long hours during the counting season; gates are closed at night but any trapped salmon are protected from predators. Counting enables invaluable scientific data to be gathered on health, size and numbers, which in turn provides a fuller picture of a waterway’s health.

The view from Here

Regarding John Threfall’s article on the new play Here: A Captive Odyssey, staged at
E&N: More red lights ahead

Bravo for publishing Roszan Holmen’s article on the E&N (December, 2014). Congratulations to her for being a finalist for a Jack Webster Award. It was the first bit of daylight in this murky story. The Island Corridor Foundation which owns the E&N property is a federally-registered charity. Where is its governing board in all of this?

Muckraking journalism has a long and noble tradition of exposé in the public interest. The question is, what do the misdeeds revealed say about the status quo in which they occur?

Ida Tarbell, in a classic case of muckraking journalism, exposed the misdoings of the Rockefeller Standard Oil Trust. What she showed was that the structure of law under which the trust operated enabled these misdoings. The Supreme Court took action. The question for Victoria is: Given what has been exposed, what is wrong with the status quo? My answer would be that metropolitan Victoria lacks a structure of effective upper tier government with the power and ability to plan and manage complex region-wide projects with a minimum of conflict. Voters have asked the Province to meet its responsibility for laws governing municipalities and regions, and to take the lead in engaging citizens in answering such a question. So far there’s silence on all fronts. Meanwhile, as long as the metropolis remains as it is, there will be plenty of fodder for muckraking, and sadly so.

John Olson

Turn focus on Oak Bay

I have to agree with Graham Ross’ letter about the lack of transparency in Oak Bay. Our family has been in the community for over 40 years. We have had good and very good mayors and councils. In the past, mayors and councils were quite open and did not do much to upset or divide the community. Our present mayor and council, except for one or two council members, seem to think transparency is just a word with no meaning.

This started with the deer situation when the mayor told the residents that to cull 25 deer would cost us $12,500. If opponents to the cull did not investigate we would never know that we paid well over twice that to cull 11 deer. There was no transparency in that case. Now with council changing things in the OCP, it is again only through Oak Bay Watch that this hoped-for (by mayor and council) building boom has been exposed. I cannot recall any previous council that divided or upset residents like this council does. Unfortunately, until a new mayor and council are elected, we still have to probe some of the “transparent” dealings going on in the community.

M. W. Robertson

Orthopaedic waiting game

In response to R. Lindsay’s letter in the Focus October issue, I beg to differ and present my own experience.

First, I have nothing but admiration and praise for all of the orthopaedic physicians facing many difficulties in working under limiting and extremely tight conditions.

Second, surgery is a personal choice undertaken after careful consideration. Surgery is serious and there are no guarantees as with a warranty on a car or appliance. It is a risk and some surgical procedures are best not done for some. A general practitioner or family MD or NP could go over this with the patient.

My understanding is the letter writer was not warned properly about the risks and discomfort, or perhaps he or she may have misunderstood the pre-operative classes and did not ask enough questions. My choice took a while because no one in my immediate circle of friends and family had ever had a knee replaced and I felt that I was too young. But I did some research on these implants and decided to go for it.

My lengthy career as a registered nurse had compounded my pain on walking and even turning over in bed. I limped with excruciating pain estimated as a 9/10 and at times a 10/10. It became worse. I had become an insomniac, so surgery was a godsend, although a warranty on a car or appliance. It is a serious and there are no guarantees as with a patient.

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When you’re in over your head or feel you are not living up to your financial potential—maybe thinking you’re “not good with money stuff”—it’s not just a financial issue, it’s an emotional issue. To really get your life and finances on track—permanently—you must fundamentally transform your faulty beliefs and habits around money on a cellular level.

Karen Taylor—widowed early and feeling confused and overwhelmed by taxes and debt after her husband’s death—did transform. But she didn’t see a therapist or a counsellor. She worked with Tanya Sterling, a chartered accountant who also happens to have the "extra dimension" of training and expertise as a certified financial coach. Karen was able to release her self-defeating financial thinking—and replace it with her own "financial brilliance."

"Tanya has empathy, extensive education and experience. I felt instantaneous relief that I had taken this first step to ask for help," says Karen. “I felt completely comfortable discussing various life decisions—some emotionally charged—that had led me to my difficult situation. I now have clear boundaries when it comes to money; I feel relaxed and confident. All my ducks are in a row!"

"I’m not a counsellor or a therapist," says Tanya with a warm smile. "As an experienced financial expert, I provide the financial education and structure, and also use award-winning tools to remove the roadblocks which may have otherwise limited a successful integration. This coaching methodology guarantees results 100 percent of the time, providing a return on investment after just one session. The beauty of tapping into your own ‘financial brilliance’ is that the solution is perfect and just for you.”

—Tanya Sterling, CPA, CA

When catastrophe, he doesn’t see the connection between the rampant growth fuelled by the wealthy developer class and the panhandler. There is no shortage of new housing for all of those new wealthier citizens coming down the pike; there is nothing for the panhandler and the working poor who are displaced by all of this vibrancy.

TimberWest responds

I am compelled to correct Briony Penn’s characterization of TimberWest’s involvement in the Great Bear Rainforest’s multi-stakeholder planning process and our company’s actions in respect of that process as described in her September edition article entitled “Sonora Island old-growth forests to feed pensioners?”

First, the process to reach a Great Bear Rainforest Order under provincial legislation is one that formally began in 1997 with dozens of stakeholder tables convened to develop the Central Coast Land & Resource Management Plan. TimberWest actively participated over that entire period, contributing thousands of hours of staff time and providing over $250,000 funding for study work to support the process.

Secondly, we have relinquished significant timber harvesting rights without compensation to make the deal work. Specifically, TimberWest has relinquished over 20 percent of its production from the area. When certain cutblocks became controversial on Sonora Island several years ago, we voluntarily suspended work in the area even though the cutblocks are fully permitted. We have invested millions of dollars in roads and planning in those suspended cutblocks. We are working with the residents of Sonora Island and other key stakeholders to find a mutually acceptable path forward.

Ecosystem-based management is predicated on maintaining the appropriate balance between ecological integrity and human well-being. TimberWest continues to be fully committed to achieving this goal in the southern Great Bear Rainforest. TimberWest has been operating on the coast of BC for over a century. We are proud of the over 1000 people who work for and with us every day to ensure that our working forest continues to be sustainably managed for generations to come.

Domenico Iannidinardo, RPF, RPBio, PEng
VP, Sustainability & Chief Forester,
TimberWest

Domenico Iannidinardo, RPF, RPBio, PEng
VP, Sustainability & Chief Forester,
TimberWest
Exxon’s climate lie
BILL MCKIBBEN

Decades ago the company’s scientists warned about climate change but Exxon executives chose to fund doubt.

I’m well aware that with Paris looming it’s time to be hopeful, and I’m willing to try. Even amid the record heat and flooding of the present, there are good signs for the future in the rising climate movement and the falling cost of solar.

But before we get to past and present there’s some past to be reckoned with, and before we get to hope there’s some deep, blood-red anger.

In the last three weeks, two separate teams of journalists—the Pulitzer-prize winning reporters at the website Inside Climate News and another crew composed of Los Angeles Times veterans and up-and-comers at the Columbia Journalism School—have begun publishing the results of a pair of independent investigations into ExxonMobil.

Though they draw on completely different archives, leaked documents, and interviews with ex-employees, they reach the same damning conclusion: Exxon knew all that there was to know about climate change decades ago, and instead of alerting the rest of us, denied the science and obstructed the politics of global warming.

To be specific:

By 1978 Exxon’s senior scientists were telling top management that climate change was real, caused by man, and would raise global temperatures by 2-3 degrees Celsius this century, which was pretty much spot-on.

By the early 1980s they’d validated these findings with shipborne measurements of CO2 (they outfitted a giant tanker with carbon sensors for a research voyage) and with computer models that showed precisely what was coming. As the head of one key lab at Exxon Research wrote to his superiors, there was “unanimous agreement in the scientific community that a temperature increase of this magnitude would bring about significant changes in the Earth’s climate, including rainfall distribution and alterations in the biosphere.”

And by the early 1990s, their researchers studying the possibility for new exploration in the Arctic were well aware that human-induced climate change was melting the poles. Indeed, they used that knowledge to plan their strategy, reporting that soon the Beaufort Sea would be ice-free as much as five months a year instead of the historic two. Greenhouse gases are rising “due to the burning of fossil fuels,” a key Exxon researcher told an audience of engineers at a conference in 1991. “Nobody disputes this fact.”

But of course Exxon did dispute that fact. Not inside the company, where they used their knowledge to buy oil leases in the areas they knew would melt, but outside, where they used their political and financial might to make sure no one took climate change seriously.

They helped organise campaigns designed to instil doubt, borrowing tactics and personnel from the tobacco industry’s similar fight. They funded “institutes” devoted to outright climate denial. And at the highest levels they did all they could to spread their lies.

To understand the treachery—the sheer, profound, and I think unparalleled evil—of Exxon, one must remember the timing. Global warming became a public topic in 1988, thanks to NASA scientist James Hansen, but it’s taken a quarter-century and counting for the world to take effective action. If at any point in that journey Exxon—largest oil company on Earth, most profitable enterprise in human history—had said: “Our own research shows that these scientists are right and that we are in a dangerous place,” the faux debate would effectively have ended. That’s all it would have taken; stripped of the cover provided by doubt, humanity would have gotten to work.

Instead, knowingly, they helped organise the most consequential lie in human history, and kept that lie going past the point where we can protect the poles, prevent the acidification of the oceans, or slow sea level rise enough to save the most vulnerable regions and cultures. Businesses misbehave all the time, but VW is the flea to Exxon’s elephant. No corporation has ever done anything this big and this bad.

I’m aware that anger at this point does little good. I’m aware that all clever people will say “of course they did” or “we all use fossil fuels,” as if either claim is meaningful. I’m aware that nothing much will happen to Exxon—I doubt they’ll be tried in court, or their executives sent to jail.

But nonetheless it seems crucial simply to say, for the record, the truth: this company had the singular capacity to change the course of world history for the better and instead it changed that course for the infinitely worse. In its greed Exxon helped—more than any other institution—to kill our planet.

Bill McKibben is an author and environmental educator. This article originally appeared in The Guardian and has been reprinted here under licence.

In mid-October, the heads of 10 major oil and gas companies committed to “play their part” in battling climate change. Not a single Canadian or American oil or gas company joined that coalition.
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Late last May I received an interesting phone call from Dr Gerald Graham. Graham had made a presentation to an August 14, 2013 CRD Board meeting at which an extraordinary incident had occurred minutes before he spoke. When Graham phoned, he told me he had filed an FOI for whatever investigation of the incident had been undertaken by the CRD. He told me there was no doubt at the CRD about who was responsible for the incident and that the FOI records he obtained showed this. When I asked if he would share those records he was non-committal. In the end he didn’t share them. I’ll come back to Graham and draw a connection to the infamous installation of surveillance software on Saanich Mayor Richard Atwell’s computer, but first let me tell you about what happened at that 2013 CRD Board meeting.

The matter being discussed was the CRD’s proposed $783-million sewage treatment plan. Twenty-one individuals had pre-registered to address the board on the merits of a motion by Saanich Councillor Vic Derman. Derman was proposing that the CRD “initiate an extensive, independent review of the current [McLoughlin Point] project.” His motion set out specific objectives for that review.

The very first presentation on the schedule of speakers was a video by East Sooke fisherman and diver Allan Crow, a proponent of sewage treatment. Crow’s video had been previously uploaded by CRD staff to a laptop used to include visual presentations from the public at such meetings. At that point in the meeting the presentations of all the participants who were going to use the overhead projection system had been loaded onto the laptop. Crow started his video. The CRD’s minutes for the meeting provide a brief outline of what happened: “During the presentation it became apparent that the video had been tampered with. The Chair asked that Mr Crow return at the end of the delegation list to play an original version of the video.”

Times Colonist reporter Rob Shaw’s account of the incident was more fulsome: “A local diver tried to play a video for the board of underwater conditions near a sewage outfall. But unknown opponents secretly altered his file on the CRD computer, so the words ‘misleading’ were superimposed on the video.” Shaw went on to observe: “CRD chairman Alastair Bryson stopped the presentation and asked the perpetrator to step forward. But no one did.”

Gerald Graham was scheduled to speak immediately after Crow’s aborted video and then his presentation was followed by 20 others, including Crow’s unaltered video at the end. In between, among the speakers who used the CRD’s laptop to provide a visual component to their presentation, was Richard Atwell. At the time, Atwell was a community activist well known for doggedly critiquing the CRD’s every move on its sewage treatment plan.

Let me go back to Graham’s phone call. As I mentioned above, Graham told me he had filed an FOI for any investigation conducted by the CRD into the incident. Graham said the CRD knew who had tampered with the video. He volunteered this information after obliquely referring to the Saanich spyware stories I had written. I was intrigued. Was the incident involving Crow’s video somehow linked to the installation of spyware on the newly-elected mayor’s computer?

I eventually filed my own FOI with the CRD for the records Graham had received. What the CRD released included an email sent on August 15, 2013 to several CRD staff that described what they believed had happened: “We suspect the person downloaded the video from Youtube ahead of time (they knew the video was there), made the edits, and then deleted the version we had on our laptop and replaced it with their version. Not nice.”

The records also show that, two weeks later, a second CRD employee stated, “…the delegation simply came up to the laptop and did what he wanted to under the guise of getting ready, even though his presentation had already been placed on the laptop.”

It should be mentioned that the CRD emails do not name who “he” was, but with careful consideration of the short list of people who made presentations involving the CRD’s laptop at that meeting, and knowing a little about each of those people, it would be challenging to not come to the conclusion that “he” was Richard Atwell. Given the context of Graham’s phone call to me, it was evident that Graham himself had come to that conclusion. How many other people believed that Atwell had tampered with Crow’s presentation? The email records show that upwards of 13 CRD employees were made aware of the details of the CRD’s investigation into the incident.

I recently spoke with Mayor Atwell and told him about the CRD’s investigation and Graham’s FOI. I asked him if he’d switched Crow’s video files at that 2013 CRD board meeting. Atwell was unwilling to either confirm or deny that he was the person who made the switch.

The records provided to me by the CRD also show that on the day after the video incident, Saanich Councillor Judy Brownoff asked CRD staff about what steps they would be taking to secure the presentation laptop. It’s not hard to imagine that other CRD directors made similar inquiries and that with so many CRD staff aware of the details of the investigation, Richard Atwell, citizen activist, had quickly gained a level of notoriety amongst local government civil servants and politicians as—to use Rob Shaw’s words—“the perpetrator.”

Just 15 months after the video incident, Atwell was—to the astonishment of many—elected mayor of Saanich.

Within six days of that election, employee monitoring software had been installed on the mayor-elect’s designated computer, ready to record every single keystroke he made. As well, his computer was configured...
to prevent him from accessing the District’s corporate intranet. On top of that, access to the departmental drives that were formerly available to Mayor Frank Leonard were denied to Mayor Atwell.

Why did Saanich staff feel such an urgent need to isolate, confine and monitor the new mayor’s computer activity even before he’d spent a minute in office? Had they been warned about Atwell’s suspected involvement in the video tampering incident?

The official answer to that question came after the spyware had been outed. The District’s Director of Corporate Services Laura Ciarniello was asked by BC’s Information and Privacy Commissioner Elizabeth Denham why the software had been installed. Denham reported: “According to Ciarniello, the motivation for this renewed focus on IT security was the perception by District Directors that the new mayor was experienced in the area of IT and would be able to identify and criticize current weaknesses in the District’s IT security.”

But that rationale has been limp from the beginning. It requires a suspension of common sense to believe that such a hostile initiative—secretly installing spyware on the newly-elected mayor’s computer—was put in place to avoid criticism. On the other hand, with rumours about Atwell’s involvement in the 2013 video incident circulating from CRD staff to Saanich politicians and then to Saanich bureaucrats—well it’s not so difficult to understand that the real motivation could have been the fear that Atwell might exploit those “current weaknesses.”

This theory is lent credence by the report of “Whistleblower,” a Saanich IT division employee involved in installing the surveillance software. Concerned about the unethical nature of such covert surveillance, he wrote down his recollection of what he’d been told by Saanich’s Assistant Manager of IT John Proc: “John Proc came to us...with a directive that had just come down to IT in regards to installing monitoring software on the mayor’s computer. He said, ‘They are nervous about the new mayor. We’re installing it on the directors’ computers as well to make it [look like] it is not targeted’...”

After repeatedly asking his managers if the mayor had been informed about the spyware, and not receiving an affirmative response, Whistleblower took his concerns—and that recollection—to a former colleague, who then contacted Atwell. On January 12, 2015, the mayor announced at a press conference that, among other things, he was being spied on by his own staff.

Atwell’s claim was immediately countered by a press release issued by Saanich councillors on January 13, which stated: “This installation was in response to the conclusions of a May 2014 independent, external audit of the District of Saanich computer system. Recommendations from the May 2014 audit included the installation of security software.”

It was later revealed by Denham, however, that the security audit’s author “did not make any such recommendation nor did he intend to make any recommendation that could be interpreted to recommend the installation of monitoring software such as Spector 360.” Indeed, Denham’s investigation concluded that the installation of the monitoring software had likely lowered the security of the District’s computer network.

All this raises questions about transparency on everyone’s part, including Atwell, but it also raises the question of whether any elected Saanich official played a direct, supportive role in Ciarniello’s decision to install spyware on the incoming mayor’s computer. If so, that would have represented the kind of politicization of a civil servant’s role that was, by all accounts, common in East Germany in 1984 but which most people, one would hope, would agree has no place at all in Saanich.

David Broadland is the publisher of Focus Magazine.
A thicket of 12 rusting steel pipes sprouted in front of the new Johnson Street Bridge’s bascule pier in mid-October. Now a permanent feature of the project, fendering was somehow left out of architectural renderings of the controversial project. The steel pipes are part of a redesigned fendering system. Engineers’ concerns about the ability of the new bridge to withstand the impact of a marine collision have apparently led to much more extensive (and expensive) fendering than originally anticipated. In July the City of Victoria’s Project Director Jonathan Huggett told City councillors the new structure will be “somewhat less robust” than the existing bridge and so the fendering needed to be beefed up.

An email obtained by Focus through an FOI shows that the company building the bridge, PCL Constructors Westcoast, submitted a change order to cover the cost of more substantial fendering late last March. That change order was based on fendering design specifications sent to the City on March 26 and is believed to cover all of the fendering except that required for the north side approach. The email did not indicate the dollar value of PCL’s change order request.

Huggett told City councillors in July he would seek their approval for the additional cost of fendering needed for the north side approach to the bridge, which he estimated would cost an additional $3 million. But in mid-September Huggett described the additional cost of fendering as “upwards of $4 million” without indicating whether this was for the north end fendering plus the March change order amount, or just the north end fendering. The City has maintained that all PCL change order requests are subject to “mediation” and secrecy, so its likely the $4 million only applies to the north end fendering. The City’s strategy of discussing costs at in camera council meetings and publicly claiming that all costs are subject to mediation has created a situation where councillors are muzzled and FOI requests for records can legally be denied—sure signs that the project is headed for the record books.
Ross Crockford, a director of the project watchdog group JohnsonStreetBridge.org has other concerns related to fendering. “Trouble is, all the fendering in the world won’t protect the bascule span itself,” Crockford told Focus. “The new bridge will take 90 seconds to open, 50 percent longer than the old one, and double what is legally permitted in Florida. Which means a greater risk of a direct collision with the lifting span.” The 90-second lift specification is part of PCL’s contract with the City.

Crockford referred me to a video on Youtube that shows a lifting bridge on the Welland Canal being lowered when it should have been lifting, and the subsequent spectacular collision between the bridge and the MV Windoc (images above). Shit does happen.

The unique design of Victoria’s new bridge means the lifting span will float on top of a nest of steel rollers. Span locks at either end of the bascule span, which are engaged only when the bridge is in the fully-lowered position, are the only thing anchoring the span to its supporting piers. If the span is struck by a passing vessel as it’s lifting or lowering—the most likely scenario—there’s nothing more than the span’s dead weight to keep it from being knocked out of position. Whoops.

The bascule leaf’s lifting mechanism includes two 50-foot-diameter steel rings rotating on 24 four-foot-diameter steel support rollers. Because of the substantial friction generated by all those heavy moving parts, the new bridge will not only be slower to lift, it will require substantially more energy to do so than the existing 92-year-old bridge.

Right now the project looks more like an ordinary unfinished highway overpass than the architecturally-significant “signature bridge” promised by early bridge promoters. At the very least, though, the $90-million gap between the project’s original cost estimate of $40 million and the current best guess of $130 for the final price will likely make the City a desirable destination for people on The World’s Most Badly Estimated Building Projects Ever Tour.

David Broadland likes to build stuff but hates estimating the cost beforehand.

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Solving chronic homelessness is pretty simple—give people homes, says Sam Tsemberis, the psychologist-turned-outreach-worker credited with eliminating persistent homelessness in cities across North America, from New York City to Phoenix, Arizona.

It seems self-evident. A nice, neat solution, requiring only large cash injections, that will allow everyone to live happily ever after, with the streets cleared of the evidence of human misery now seen every day in the parks, doorways and alcoves of Greater Victoria.

Of course, it’s not that easy. In 1992 Tsemberis pioneered the Housing First model, which is now guiding Victoria’s renewed efforts to solve the region’s problem of chronic homelessness. Over the years the model, which has been embraced by most in the field, has also generated questions about the safety and value of providing homes for people with mental illness or addictions without insisting they first enter treatment or get a grip on their problems.

The Housing First model means ensuring housing remains secure and that consistent supports remain in place, even when someone screws up, whether they’ve gone off their meds, set fire to the apartment, or sold the furniture to buy drugs.

The concept seemed radical when first introduced by Tsemberis, but he points out that it mirrors a society where it’s acceptable for people to cope with life’s knocks by rushing home from work and grabbing the wine bottle. “If you require someone to be sober or psychologically stable before having housing, a lot of people in Victoria would be out of their housing right now,” Tsemberis said in an interview. “We hold the poor to a discriminatory higher standard. You don’t need to be sober to keep housing, you have to be sober enough. You don’t have to be sane, you have to be sane enough.”

Tsemberis, who was born in Greece and raised in Montreal, came to the realization that the system had it backwards while doing outreach work in New York City.

His training as a psychologist meant that, when he saw people in trouble on the street, his instinct was to take them to hospital or refer them to detox. With persistently bad outcomes, however, he soon realized that, too often, it was not mental illness or addiction that was crippling them, it was lack of money and a home.

“I’d had too much Freud and not enough Marx. I had to stop listening to my own psychology-trained mind and I had to start listening to people,” Tsemberis said.

It’s a road map that Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps is following in her efforts to find the funding and political will to house 367 chronically homeless people.

“Someone is not going to kick their addictions and get treatment for their mental health issues and is not going to deal with whatever trauma it was that put them on the streets in the first place if they are still on the street,” Helps said.

The idea to build enough units to house those 367 people is based on the recent report by the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness—“Creating Homes, Enhancing Communities”—which estimates that, to address chronic homelessness, 185 new supportive housing units are needed, plus rent supplements and support services for a further 182 individuals.

It is essential to provide a variety of housing options if the plan is to succeed, said Kelsi Stiles, Coalition acting executive director. She also noted that if those 367 chronically homeless people can be successfully housed, it will make room in emergency shelters for those experiencing temporary difficulties. “When you look at the people using emergency shelters, this is the small minority that use most of the services and, if they are housed, it frees up a lot of space in the shelter system,” she said.

IN SEPTEMBER VICTORIA CITY COUNCIL voted eight-to-one to take a motion to the Capital Regional District board asking that directors look at options for financing the capital costs of 367 new units and asking that the region approach senior governments looking for financial help. The motion to the CRD Hospital Board was signed by Helps, Ben Isitt, and chair of the Hospital Board, Dave Howe.

Before the Hospital Board directors met, the original estimate of $50 million had already reduced the proposed capital cost borrowing to $30 million because of the partial shift to rent supplements. The hope was to create a united front in the region. But the majority of CRD directors balked. Some expressed discomfort with hearing about it first in the news. Denise Blackwell said “It makes some of us feel put on the spot.” She also noted she had never seen a tent in Langford. Others complained about the lack of a plan and too little information, though it was pointed out by Helps and others that the motion was in part directed at obtaining more details as to the feasibility, costs and options for financing. In the end it was agreed that only one section of the six-part motion would be voted on: that part asking for staff to do a feasibility study, to be completed in December, looking at either the Capital Regional Hospital Board or CRD leading the plan to see more housing units with supports created in the region.

At the October 14 CRD meeting, most expressed agreement in theory that a key to any solution to regional homelessness is getting financial help from senior levels of government, though they weren’t ready to write letters to them asking for funding yet.
If the CRD eventually approves a version of the Victoria-led motion, the new federal government will be asked for help with capital and support costs—possibly as part of a much-needed national housing strategy. That federal money, would reduce the burden on local taxpayers.

While the feds have been missing-in-action for decades in building affordable housing, the new Liberal government provides reason for optimism. Housing and the need for a national housing strategy were featured in many of Prime Minister-designate Justin Trudeau’s campaign speeches. The main focus was on providing affordable housing, through tax incentives and more flexibility for new home buyers, but homelessness was also acknowledged as a problem that needed addressing.

In a statement released shortly before the election, Trudeau said a Liberal government will help build more housing units and refurbish existing ones and will provide operational funding support for municipalities. “This includes renewing support for Housing First initiatives that help homeless Canadians find stable housing,” he said.

Under the postponed motion, the Province would be asked to pay for support services and operating costs, estimated at $8.2-million annually, based on $22,219 per person per year. So far, Housing Minister Rich Coleman has shown cautious interest in looking at the plan on a project by project basis, according to Helps.

“We are not going to borrow $1 unless we have the provincial government and the federal government at the table with us,” emphasized Helps, who is hoping that a spirit of partnership at the regional level will emerge and persuade senior governments to become involved.

“I think there’s a true glimmer of hope that, with these proposals, if we can go to the province and the feds as a united voice as a region, we might actually be able to tackle this problem,” she said.

An added incentive is the well-known economic argument that the cost of treating and policing those who are chronically home-less, and the resulting paralysis of emergency departments and police services, is more expensive than providing a home and supports.

“This would be a much better use of tax dollars,” Helps said.

NO ONE WOULD BE HAPPIER to see a solution than Reverend Al Tysick, founder of the Victoria Dandelion Society, a group that helps some of Victoria’s most difficult to house.

“Anything they are building is good for me. I don’t care if it’s a garage where we can put people to keep them out of the rain. It’s better than the doorways where they are at the moment,” said Tysick, who is on the streets before dawn every day, handing out coffee, cigarettes and blankets.

A major problem will be ensuring that any new housing has sufficient support staff, Tysick said, pointing out that there are not sufficient supports for high-needs clients in Victoria’s existing projects.

“They haven’t got the money to run them now. It would take a huge injection [of money] and commitment,” Tysick said.

“When you invite the homeless into your home, you are inviting the street in. It follows them through the door—hoarders, mental illnesses and addictions,” he said.

Tysick applauds Helps’ efforts, but points to previous failures to obtain support from senior governments. He also notes that the visible street problems are only the tip of the iceberg and beneath the surface there are many more, including families and single moms, struggling to deal with poverty and insecure or inadequate housing.

“I haven’t seen any commitment from the federal government,” said Tysick, who is discouraged that no political party has come up with a viable national policy to end poverty.

“So, until all the municipalities come together—provincially and federally—it’s just a fart in the air,” he said. “It’s a really big puzzle with many pieces, but it seems we don’t have the courage to really tackle that puzzle in a country that could afford to end poverty.”

Kathy Stinson, Victoria Cool Aid Society executive director, echoes the concern that other governments or neighbouring municipalities might not be supportive, even though it is increasingly obvious that homelessness is not just a downtown problem.

“I think, regardless, we have to keep pushing the province to bring supports to the table,” she said.

Stinson agrees that any long-term solution has to address big issues such as poverty, health care, and providing more help to families so kids don’t end up in care. “We need a system overhaul,” she said.

Another worry is that, if taxpayers are shelling out cash to address chronic homelessness, they will be shocked to see some people still on the street.

Tysick believes a low barrier shelter, that gives people a bed even if they are drunk or stoned, should be part of the solution. For example, when Victoria’s Extreme Weather Response Plan clicks into place this fall, providing an extra 80 shelter beds, some of his clients will still be on the street because they have been barred due to their behaviour.

Helps acknowledges that the plan to house 367 people will not be a magic bullet, but believes it could be the start of a change. “The thought that people will never see anyone sitting on Pandora Street or anywhere else is pie-in-the-sky,” Helps said. “There will always be people who have challenges and there will always be people who will fall through the cracks, but we are talking about setting up an ecosystem of housing so, when people do fall through the cracks, they don’t have to stay on the street for so long,” she said.

Housing First’s founder Isemberis told me that as Helps battles to gain the support of capital region municipalities and struggles to pry cash from the federal and provincial governments, she should remember that she provides the best hope for solving the city’s problem of chronic homelessness. “The best place to start addressing the problem is at the municipal level… Only at the city level do we know who’s homeless by name,” he said.

Financial support from senior levels of government is essential, Isemberis added. “But someone in the mayor’s office has to guide it.”

Judith Lavoie is an award-winning journalist specializing in the environment, First Nations, and social issues. Twitter @LavoieJudith
Qamina Hunter starts our telephone conversation by telling me I’ve reached the general store in Ahousat village. I apologize that I have called the wrong number (Is there a general store in Ahousat?). Then I hear him laugh. Judging by the children’s voices in the background, it might as well be a general store I’ve reached. Qamina’s house is certainly some kind of major hub for this First Nation of 2000 people.

Carver, fisherman, wilderness tour guide, youth counsellor, activist, ex-fish farm worker, grandfather, basketball coach and wise guy, Hunter laughs again when I cautiously ask him what his western title is. “Better say carver because that’s the one I’m famous for.” His masks are famous—in more ways than one. They have been all over the media lately. Masks with the tears of swimming salmon on them, strapped to boats of Ahousaht protestors who—for the first time in BC’s conflicted history with fish farming—successfully stopped one. The offending proposed farm was due to go into Ahousaht territory, at a place called Yaakswiis—a real general store of the region, a bay near the salmon-bearing Atleo River where you used to be able to get all the food you needed before the fish farms arrived.

(Careful readers will notice two apparently different spellings of “Ahousat” in this story. Ahousat refers to the village, Ahousaht to the people and their land.)

Qamina, as one of the elders, provided support to the younger Ahousaht activists led by Lennie John, who camped out on the new floating catwalks and successfully blocked fish farm giant Cermaq’s access to the net pens.

How and why did a carver grandfather turn into an activist? Qamina describes how from the day the fish farms arrived nearly 20 years ago, he had concerns about them. A fisherman of 45 years, there isn’t too much on the sea that misses his notice. “Our fishing collapsed, it went downhill and that is all we knew. Our people used to swim down to become what they wanted to become—whether it was a great speaker or a warrior in the village.” They put a farm right on top of it without consulting the elders, Tsahsiits told him.

Meanwhile, outside the pens, Ahousaht fishermen were pulling up Atlantics in droves with buzz bombs and their own nets, to keep the non-native species from intermingling with the returning Pacific salmon species. “There was a lot more escapes than they said,” says Qamina. He and other Ahousaht fishermen protested and Qamina lost his job: “They let me go because they saw my boat out there protesting.”

He says he had seen enough to know that there were other problems. “I noticed the deterioration of our fish, but also the divide it has created, not only bleeding our stocks but bleeding our ties together.”

But the leadership of Ahousaht had signed an agreement with Mainstream/Cermaq in 2002. The protocol was renewed in 2008, 2010 and then extended for another 5 years last January. The most recent iteration identified problem sites, like Dixon Bay west of the Megin River, that needed re-siting away from what were referred to as “Pristine Areas.” Yaakswiis was intended to be a replacement site for the Dixon Bay farm, which was believed to be more vulnerable. But for Qamina and others, no location is good.

Qamina’s 87-year-old father Stanley Sam—or Tsahsiits—told his son that these sites are too culturally important to be invaded by farms. He told Qamina that below one of the farms, “is a cave underwater that our people used to swim down to become what they wanted to become—whether it was a great speaker or a warrior in the village.” They put a farm right on top of it without consulting the elders, Tsahsiits told him.

Qamina also points out, “People didn’t know the impacts of the fish farms to our territory. They didn’t know about all the sludge and the crap that dumps into the ocean. One of my nephews who worked on a farm says: ‘I can’t speak. There are a lot of things that
they tell us not to say.’ So my encouragement was: Just do the right thing.”

According to Qaamina, every family had someone working for Cermaq. One of his own sons worked for Cermaq, as have nephews. His son knew what was going on in the inside and had decided he wanted out; he planned to become an RCMP officer. Unfortunately, a week after he quit the fish farm, he was in a fatal float plane crash. Qaamina took in two of his orphaned grandchildren and started on a project to ease his loss through carving masks for all his grandchildren to celebrate a teaching that his mother, Katie Sam, had provided.

“My mother always told me about the sacred salmon; how they searched for you and you didn’t search for them. And that is the theme for every carving, so I basically put salmon-sacred tears on the masks.”

It is these masks that have found their way, lashed to the bow of protest boats, into the media recently. “I thought of my mum when I told her I hated these farms. I just despised them. Not the workers, not the human beings. I respect human life, but I just couldn’t stand them. Not the workers, not the human beings.”

“I NOTICED THE DETERIORATION OF OUR FISH, but also the divide it has created, not only bleeding our stocks but bleeding our ties together.”

— Qaamina Hunter

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The issue came to a head this summer with a decision by Christy Clark to issue two new tenures on the August long weekend despite the recommendations of the Cohen Commission for DFO to review and change the siting criteria and analyze all current licenses to meet the new criteria. DFO did review the sites with some criteria and rejected one at Hebert Inlet (a first for DFO), but Yaakswiis got the green light, perhaps as the sacrificial lamb for re-siting Dixon Bay. Ahousaht warrior Lennie John spearheaded a petition to the hereditary leadership (who had approved the farm’s site), while biologist Alex Morton took a 106,000-signature petition to the legislature. When the catwalks and pens started accumulating on Tofino docks late this summer, they knew a protest would be necessary to protect Yaakswiis.

Qaamina’s role in the blockade was doing what he always does at basketball tournaments, potlatches and functions of the village. “I supported them circling the farm doing silent prayers and I made a statement: that the power that we carry from our ancestors is still alive within us.” Qaamina has coached most of the young people of the village at some time or other, as well as being a parent, foster parent, uncle and of course grandparent. With the general store of the Hunter clan supporting them, the younger warriors were on solid footing.

The blockade continued for 13 days and on September 21 the company agreed to remove the farm. Dan Lewis and Bonny Glambeck of Clayoquot Action were witnesses in Qaamina’s boat and they report that in the final hours of the blockade Qaamina left them to do a stream purification ritual. He explained, “A long time ago, we were all praying people for our salmon. We all went onto the ocean and swam together praying for the fish to come…We have to start by putting everything back to the way it was. The old way.” The Ahousaht fisheries boat arrived at the floats being dismantled and the hereditary and elected chiefs asked Qaamina to join their ceremony.

When asked why he thought the leadership rescinded their approval of the farm, Qaamina said: “I think because of pressures. Even though a Chief can make a final decision and say the way it is going to be, people have more of a voice.”

Qaamina is full of plans to see the return of the salmon “back for our grandchildren.” He wants more information for his people. Tsaahsits wants native names re-established for all the places where the fish farms are because “they all have a story and a meaning and they were given to us by the creator.”

According to Glambeck and Lewis, “the social licence to do fish farms is almost gone. People don’t want an expansion, they don’t want the farms.” Qaamina believes the salmon will come back but “we have to work together to make these things happen. It took nine very strong people to get it overturned with support and supporters. I’m thinking of Lennie John’s words: ‘Imagine what we could do as a nation?’”

Briony Penn PhD is the author of the new book, The Real Thing: The Natural History of Ian McTaggart Cowan, which will be launched on November 18 at the Royal BC Museum, 7pm. (Free but registration required, royalbcmuseum.bc.ca.)
The slippery stats on flu vaccines

ALAN CASSELS

Are flu shots 60 percent effective? Or are they 3 percent effective in a good year and 1 percent in a bad year?

It’s the season when the flu sound bites are flying around like sneezes in a windstorm, threatening to infect anything in contact. Despite all the media discussion of mutating viruses, hand hygiene and anti-flu drugs, there is a common punchline to all the chatter: “The best thing you can do to protect yourself is get the flu shot.”

According to the US Centre for Disease Control the flu vaccine this year will be “50 to 60 percent effective in preventing flu in those who get their shots,” a level of effectiveness that often gets repeated by Canadian public health officials.

Closer to home, officials from the BC Centre for Disease Control are in the news, talking up the numbers and usually providing at least one photo op of an official rolling up her sleeve for the needle—literally taking one for the team.

Despite the campaign, the discussions on ways to best protect ourselves from viruses are narrow and shallow, with lots of unknowns. One surprising story originating from BC researchers last year said that people who get repeated vaccinations may actually undermine the vaccine’s effectiveness.

The number that stands proud and tall this year is “60” as in “the vaccine reduces the risk by 60 percent!”

Sixty sounds good. Impressive. Powerful. More than half! But that number is as uninformative as a used car salesmen plastering “60 percent off” signs on every car on the lot, without him ever telling us what the regular prices are.

People hearing “60 percent reduction” picture this inside their thought bubble: “If my risk of getting the flu this winter is 100 percent, the shot will reduce that to 40 percent. So instead of 100 people getting the flu, if everyone was vaccinated only 40 would get it. Hmmmm. This 60 percent reduction sounds like great odds.”

Dr Danuta Skowronski at BC’s Centre for Disease Control echoed those reductions when she told Canadian Press in October that the shot could provide up to a 50 percent reduction in flu risk. She told CP: “If I were to give to you a discount coupon that gave you 50 percent off your grocery bill at the checkout stand, you would probably think that was great. And in the same way, a 50 percent reduction in influenza risk is really important.”

But, in terms of influenza, we still don’t know what the baseline is.

Centre for Disease Control vaccine effectiveness (VE) studies commonly measured laboratory confirmed flu illness that results in a doctor’s visit or urgent care visit as an outcome. So a VE estimate of 60 percent means that the flu vaccine reduces a person’s risk of developing a laboratory-confirmed flu illness that results in a visit to the doctor’s office or urgent care provider by 60 percent.

Those are significant qualifiers, usually left unstated. Most of us don’t bother seeking lab tests or medical help when we come down with a flu-like illness. So we are left out of those stats completely.

Last year’s vaccine effectiveness, Skowronski told Victoria News, was about 23 percent (again this likely only refers to those lab-verified cases that didn’t end up in a doctor’s office or hospital). Calling it “stupendously bad,” she blamed it on an “under-performing H3N2 component of the vaccine,” that didn’t match the strain in circulation.

And that’s the nub of it: Predicting the dominant strains that will be circulating in any given year, 6-8 months in advance, is a crap shoot.

For more information, I called Dr Tom Jefferson of the Cochrane Collaboration in Rome. He is probably the world’s foremost expert on the evidence behind the influenza vaccine. The Cochrane Collaboration is a global independent network of researchers, professionals, patients and others interested in health. Free from corporate and governmental influence, its mission is to organize medical research information in a systematic way to allow health professionals, policy-makers, and the public to make evidence-based decisions.

Dr Jefferson reminds me that every flu season has over 200 circulating viruses which can cause influenza and influenza-like illness, all perfectly capable of making you headachy and feverish. The best evidence shows that up to 40 percent of acute respiratory infections and influenza-like illnesses have no recognizable cause, so none of these would be included in CDC-type vaccine effectiveness stats. Thankfully, most people who catch one of these viruses end up just fine and the risk of death or serious illness in otherwise healthy people is rare.

When Jefferson and his colleagues published Cochrane’s March 2014 review, they found that under ideal conditions (when the vaccine matches the main viruses circulating that season) you need to vaccinate 33 healthy adults to avoid one set of influenza symptoms. This is what we’d call a NNV (Numbers Needed to Vaccinate) of 33. When the vaccine match isn’t very good (as it was last year) the NNV is about 100. Put another way, of 100 people vaccinated, 99 will see no benefit and one person will avoid one set of influenza symptoms. Flu vaccination did not seem to affect the number of people hospitalized or who lost working
SORRY, I HAVE NO IDEA where the 60 percent comes from—it’s either pure propaganda or bandied about by people who do not understand epidemiology.” —Dr Tom Jefferson, The Cochrane Collaboration

days. Overall this means the vaccine offers between one and three percent effectiveness.

As for the magical 60 percent, Dr Jefferson didn’t mince words: “Sorry, I have no idea where the 60 percent comes from—it’s either pure propaganda or bandied about by people who do not understand epidemiology. In both cases they should not be making policy as they do not know what they are talking about.”

So what is Canada’s policy? Generally, all the official government-sanctioned advice lines up in a single sound bite: Get the flu shot. Canada’s Public Health Agency is currently revving up its annual flu campaign and provincial health authorities are readying their staff to deliver up to 12 million doses of the flu vaccine. In BC the vaccine is publicly subsidized (I never use the word “free” because taxpayers are still paying for it) for a wide variety of people: seniors, their caregivers, children, people who look after children, corrections officers, aboriginals, pregnant women, and, of course, health care workers, for whom the vaccine is not just recommended, it’s required.

For the 2015-16 flu season, BC Centre for Disease Control states that to date, BC has spent $9.1 million on flu vaccines, an amount that is almost double what it spent four years ago. When you add on what people pay privately for the vaccine, plus all the administration and clinic costs (the doctors, pharmacists and nurses’ salaries and fees to give you the needle), the overall cost might well be double. (No one from the BC Ministry of Health could tell me what all the flu vaccine administration costs add up to.) One thing is clear: this is a hugely expensive venture which probably exceeds $20 million per year.

Totally worth it, right? Hmm.

Most flu vaccine cheerleaders are not paid stooges to the drug industry; they are public health officials clearly wanting to do the right thing. They will say that even if the numbers are small—if it’s only effective in one to three percent of vaccinated people—this still means a lot of people are protected from getting a deadly flu. Maybe, but I wonder where there might be a bigger payoff for an investment of less than $10 to $20 million.

Dr Lisa Polinsky also wonders. She’s a Victoria naturopathic physician who faces flu vaccine questions from her patients every autumn. Her take on immunity is that while the flu vaccine might be effective for the few strains of dominant virus floating around, she counsels her patients to think about the bigger picture of overall innate immunity. Her advice: “Don’t go narrowband, go broadband.” Clearly she’d like to see more research and emphasis on a variety of areas—perhaps Vitamin D or probiotics—that hold a lot of promise to strengthen overall human immunity to fight off viruses, while contributing to a person’s general wellbeing.

She tells me, for example, that Vitamin D deficiency is poorly understood and we need way more understanding of what are optimal levels, whether people in our northern latitudes benefit from supplementation, or if adding vitamin D rich foods to our diets would help. In addition to that, she says, “There’s also a lot more we need to understand about the microbiome, essentially the bacterial colony that resides in your gut where 70 percent of your immune system is hosted.”

When people understand the very marginal benefits of the annual flu shot, as well as the rare risk of harm (previously reported in Focus, October 2012; with a response by BC’s Provincial Officer of Health in November 2012) it might start a different discussion. “Patients ask ‘what else can I do?’” says Dr Polinsky. “This is what starts the bigger conversation.”

When you think of the tens of millions of dollars BC pours into its annual flu campaign, surely a wider public conversation over whether we need to continue funding an underperforming flu vaccine, delivered at high cost, is needed. Are other immune “protection” interventions worthy of public health dollars? Maybe once the public starts to understand that the meme “a flu shot is your best protection” is a gross exaggeration—some might even say a total con job—we can properly consider the next question: “now what?”

Amy Frank’s art practice encompasses creative expression, advocacy and powerful coping tools in her struggle with mental illness.

In Amy Frank’s illustration “Changing Seasons” (see this month’s cover), a crisp maple leaf floats on the surface of the Goldstream River. Rendered in pale yellow, brown, green and gold pencil crayon with a black ink line whispering around each of its interior veins, the leaf emerges from the picture plane due, paradoxically, to its simplicity. Below the suggested surface of the water, a cacophony of colour and pattern causes the eye to dance from one visual target to another. The fine detail is thereby temporarily contained, pulling the leaf toward the viewer. (Fun fact: this common phenomenon is called saccadic suppression.) Simultaneously, the intricate patterns in the background evoke the rush and babble of the river and create a multisensory capsule of place.

In time, however, the eye wants to settle on the detail. The fine pen and ink dots, circles, concentric swirls, lines and crosshatching are sectioned off and combined, then filled in with coloured pencil and watercolour pencil. Hues range from cool purples, greens and blues to vibrant oranges to form the pebbled riverbed and suggest cool flowing water, perhaps salmon eggs, and the multitude of minuscule life forms with which the water teems. The viewer is lulled into a quiet, contemplative interlude.

These areas of fine detail and pattern are ubiquitous in Frank’s work. In some, like “Memories of Merlot,” (page opposite) the patterns in the leaves, vines and especially the background suggest the warmth of textiles. In others, they remain stark black and white, heightening the relief of the subject while adding visual interest in counterpoint. Over time, this has become an intuitive process for the artist: “I see a balance in it—balancing out the colour with the black and white—and I know the balance in myself, so I can feel it when I look at it,” she says.

The feeling Frank gets is more than the gratification of a pleasing image. For her, art-making has become an important way to understand, communicate and manage the bipolar disorder she was diagnosed with at the age of 18. On her website, she explains, “Art is a source of conflict for me. It eases my depression while in contrast it can stimulate my manic symptoms. The feelings of creativity that I experience can be overwhelming, and I can become overstimulated when playing with composition and colour. In contrast, the black and white patterns I create put me into a meditative state, relieving the mania into a stream of quiet thought.”

As a child Frank loved drawing. “I started by copying comic book characters—Archie comics, Marvel comics. X-men, that kind of stuff. I was a bit of a tomboy,” she laughs. Born in 1986 in Saskatoon, Frank’s family moved to Victoria when she was a year old, and she has lived here since. Her parents nurtured her emerging talent, enrolling her in courses, including at the Vancouver Island School of Art when she was 13 years old. She learned techniques with charcoal and pastel, and basics of drawing and composition.

This was when Frank also began to struggle with her mental health. “Before I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, I suffered from depression,” she shares. Frank turned to art and writing—journalling and poetry—as outlets. In school, she would escape into the soothing patterns she would doodle in her notebooks. Art and writing helped her cope for several years, but a darkness descended when she was 18 and she did neither until she was 24.

On her website, which highlights her artwork and advocates for mental health while candidly sharing her story, it states, “Mental illness created tension and discord in all areas of her life. Teachers and school administrators labelled her a troublemaker, her friendships were fractured, and she became the target of school bullies…” She spent time living on the streets, involved with drug abuse, as well as having extended stays at psychiatric care facilities.

She’s not exactly certain what prompted her to put pen to paper once again, but events coalesced in a way that let in some light. Part of it was coming across a drawing she had done when she was 17 called “Afghan Girl” and realizing it was not half bad. “That’s a piece that’s very meaningful to me,” she says. While it used to signify despair, she now sees it as a hopeful image.
“Memories of Merlot” by Amy Frank, watercolour, pencil and ink on paper
The patterns she used to doodle in her schoolbooks have evolved. She started by incorporating them into tree designs in black and white, then adding colour. A series of wildlife illustrations followed, combining realistic, colourful animal images with her design motifs. Predators depicted in calm repose are offered as stigma-busting metaphors for the perceived dangers associated with mental illness. Her subject matter has expanded to include landscapes, flora and still life, and charming scenes of domestic animals.

Key to Frank’s current stable and happy life are a strong support network, medication, cognitive behavioural therapy and a healthy lifestyle—she avoids caffeine and stimulants. “I also find that acupuncture has been very beneficial,” she adds.

Her art practice, though, has been essential. “It’s a reason to get up and keep going. Even if nobody was buying [my work], I would still be doing it because it’s given me meaning and purpose. I would still have my website and I would still be trying to get out there and promote awareness around mental illness because stigma is something that has affected me greatly in my life,” she says.

That is why the originals, giclée prints and cards she markets at some local shops, fairs, by commission or on her website always include a message about her personal experience with mental health. Recognition of both her artwork and advocacy are growing. Her website received a Heart Award for building awareness and understanding around bipolar disorder.

A member of the Island Illustrators Society, Frank was in both the Sooke and Sidney juried fine arts shows this year, among others. About a year ago, she started a mental health awareness group on the Fine Art America artist’s website. It now has over 300 members, many of whom have messaged her with thanks for creating that safe space. Through these gains she has learned, “I don’t have to be perfect, I don’t have to be completely stable, but I want to show that I keep going. You don’t give up; you just have to keep going through the bad days, through the good days.”

So whether viewers choose to exalt in colour or find respite in pattern, each time Frank puts pen to paper she offers a triptych of creative expression, advocacy and outlet that contributes to the ongoing journey toward understanding of mental health.

Amy Frank will be selling her artwork at the First Chance Craft Fair at the Mary Winspear Centre in Sidney on November 7 and 8, then at the Last Chance Craft Fair, same location, December 12 & 13. On December 3, see her work at the “Artists with Disabilities Showcase” at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. Find her online at www.amyfrank.ca, where she also lists mental health resources.

Aaren Madden is a Victoria writer and mother of two young children. She has an academic background in art and architecture.
visual arts

Continuing to November 1

PHYLIS ANDERSON

The Gallery at Mattick’s Farm

Continuing to November 5

100 DAYS

Martin Batchelor Gallery
Betty-Ann Lampman presents 100 portrait paintings in ink produced in 100 days. 712 Comorant St, 250-385-7919, www.martinbatchelorgallery.ca.

Continuing to November 8

RAINCOAST REFLECTIONS

Dales Gallery

Continuing to November 13

INTERSECTIONS

Gage Gallery
Anna Curtin, Samantha Dickie and Carole Thompson explore the contemporary experience of everyday life. Hours Tues-Sat, 11am-5pm. 2031 Oak Bay Ave, 250-592-2760, www.gagegallery.ca.

Continuing to November 12

HOMELESS ROMANTIC

Madrona Gallery
This collection of new works by painter Sean Yelland explores the romanticism of transcendence against the desire for a home. Images of old vans, vacant buildings and run-down homes give hints of their histories, drawing the viewer in through the silhouette in a window or an out-of-place flamingo beside a rundown ’70s sedan. 606 View St, 250-380-4660, www.madronagallery.com.

Continuing to November 15

TREASURES OF THE CHINESE SCHOLAR

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria
Works from the AGGV Asian Art collection, including a recent donation of nearly 20 important ancient inkstones. 1040 Moss St, 250-384-4171, www.aggv.ca.

Continuing to November 18

GALLERY ARTISTS

Alcheringa Gallery
Featuring a variety of fine artworks from the Pacific Rim, including the Northwest Coast of Canada, Papua New Guinea and Australia, including lessLIE, Susan Point, Maynard Johnny Jr, Chris Paul, Calvin Hunt, John Livingston, George Littlechild, Teddy Balangu, Clayton Yambon, and more. 621 Fort St, 250-383-8224, www.alcheringa-gallery.com.

Continuing to November 25

FEDERATION OF ARTISTS

Goward House
Juried show and sale of work by the Victoria chapter of Canadian Federation of Artists painters. Opening reception Nov 1, 2-4pm; or Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm. 2495 Arbutus Rd, 250-477-4401, www.gowardhouse.com/shows.

Continuing to December

ABANDON

Oswego Hotel

Continuing to January 3

THE ARTIST HERSELF

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria

Continuing to January 3

ANNA BANANA

AGGV / Open Space

Continuing to August 15, 2016

LIZ P. DEMPSEY

Commercial Alley

November 2–December 31

A CHILD’S GIFT

Gallery at Mattick’s Farm
A portion of proceeds from each painting sold in this group show will be donated to BC Children’s Hospital. Opening reception Nov 19, 4:30-7:30pm. 109-5325 Cordova Bay Rd, 250-658-8333, www.thegalleryatmatticksfarm.com.

November 2–January 9

SMALL WORKS BIG IMPACT

Eclectic Gallery
Over 20 artists offer works under $500. Artists’ reception Nov 7, 3-5pm. Oak Bay Gallery Walk Thurs Dec 3, 6-8pm. 2170 Oak Bay Avenue, 250-590-8095, www.eclecticgallery.ca.

November 6

IN CAHOOTS

Slide Room Gallery
Opening reception for a show of 50 collaborative works by 100 local artists. 7:30pm, 2549 Quadra St, 250-380-3500, www.vancouverislandschoolart.com.

November 7

PACIFIC RIM POTTERS

Knox Presbyterian Church Hall
Show and sale of works by Island potters. Free. Refreshments, door prizes. MasterCard & VISA accepted. 10am to 4pm, 2964 Richmond Rd, 250-382-0574.

November 7–29

FIRES AND BEYOND

South Shore Gallery
A show and sale from the Vancouver Island Women’s Art Textile Co-operative. Reception Nov 7, 2-4pm. Hours Mon-Fri 10:30am-5pm; Sat 10am-5pm. 2046 Otter Point Rd, 250-642-2058, www.southshoregallery.ca.

November 7 & 8

COWICHAN ARTISANS TOUR

Various venues
Cowichan Valley artisans including potters, painters, glass and wood-workers, open their studios from 10am-5pm. Pre-Christmas specials at all venues during tour weekend. Downloadable map and info: www.cowichanartisans.com.

November 10–24

VICTORIA CAMERA CLUB PRINT SHOW

Art Atelier 546 Gallery
36 juried prints by members of Victoria Camera Club, one of the largest and most active camera clubs in Canada with 300 members. Opening reception, Nov 10, 7-9pm. 546 Yates St, 250-382-1922. www.victoriacameraclub.ca.

November 12–24

BEYOND PERSONA

Dales Gallery
After 10 months under the mentorship of Quinton Gordon of Lúz Studios, seven Victoria photographers break through the wall of their self-assumed photographic personalities, letting their true vision reveal itself. Opening reception Nov 12, 7pm. 537 Fisgard St, 250-383-1552, www.dalesgallery.ca.

November 14 & 15

OAK BAY STUDIO TOUR

Various venues
This free, self-guided tour visits 36 juried prints by members of Victoria Camera Club, one of the largest and most active camera clubs in Canada with 300 members. Opening reception, Nov 10, 7-9pm. 546 Yates St, 250-382-1922. www.victoriacameraclub.ca.

November 16

CONJUNCTION

Commercial Alley
This exhibit project promotes the inter-relationship between art and nature by salvaging its wood, making functional art from it, and recording the creative process. 470 Belleview St, 250-940-3630, www.batemancentre.org.

November 17–December 5

CONJUNCTION

Gage Gallery
Original paintings, photography, mixed media and sculpture in a synthesis of ideas and imagery from the Gage Gallery Arts Collective. Reception Nov 19, 7-9pm. Hours Tues-Sat, 11am-5pm. 2031 Oak Bay Avenue, 250-592-2760, www.gagegallery.ca.

November 21

ARTISANS SHOW & SALE

Monterey Rec Centre
Paintings, cards, jewellery, sculptures, knitwear and more. Free. Refreshments available. 10am-2pm, 1975 Bee St.

November 21

EARLY BIRD HOLIDAY SALE

Cedar Hill Arts Centre
Art, pottery and crafts by Arts Centre studio artists. 10am-3pm, free parking and admission. 3220 Cedar Hill Rd, 250-475-7121, artscentre@saanich.ca.

November 26–29

WINTER MARKET

South Shore Gallery
This free, self-guided tour visits 30 Oak Bay artists in their home studios. Art cards, framed paintings, pottery, jewellery and more. 12-4pm. www.oakbayartists.com.

November 28–29/Dec 5–6

POTTERY FOR CHRISTMAS

Highlands
Earth & Fire and Winter Creek potters team up for their annual Christmas show and sale, serving hot cider. 1-5pm. 178 Ross-Durrance Rd. 250-652-5434.
November 15 (deadline)
ARTIST RESIDENCY APPLICATIONS
Bonnie Kreye Studio Residency

A NEW ARTISTS’ RESIDENCY PROGRAM, in honour of artist Bonnie McComb Kreye, has been established by her family, husband Donald Kreye and his daughters, Zoe Kreye and Sarah Marcotte, in partnership with the Vancouver Island School of Art. The Bonnie McComb Kreye Studio Residency is the first residency of its kind in Victoria.

Bonnie McComb Kreye was a Victoria-based artist and beloved art teacher, who died in July 2013. She had trained at the Alberta College of Art, the Banff Centre, and the University of Victoria. She worked in a variety of media including ceramics, printmaking, drawing, representational painting, and abstract acrylic painting. Kreye devoted her life to making art and to encouraging the creative talents of all those she came in contact with. She understood the power of art to change lives and to enrich society. The family chose to partner with VISA in offering Kreye’s studio for three-month artists’ residencies, because VISA, like Bonnie, is dedicated to arts education and support of the local art scene and community at large.

Artists-in-residence will have the use of Kreye’s 30-square-metre studio—a private, self-contained building with a washroom, work tables, and a kitchenette. A potter’s wheel and kiln can be made available. All lighting, heat, water, and insurance costs are included. The studio is walking distance to UVic, buses, grocery stores, cafés, and green spaces. (The residency does not include housing or travel.)

Three applicants will be selected each year. There will be an annual exhibition in VISA’s Slide Room Gallery to showcase work from all three participating artists.

See VISA’s website for information on application requirements. Deadline for the three 2016 residencies (winter, summer and fall) is November 15. www.vancouverislandschoolart.com
November 21–December 31
SMALL TREASURES: A CHRISTMAS EXHIBITION
Alcheringa Gallery
In honour of the holiday season, Alcheringa features a collection of new diminutive works from the Pacific Rim, including carvings and sculpture, serigraphs and paintings as well as new and innovative mixed-media works and elegant jewellery. Treat the art-lover in your life to a fine indigenous treasure this year. Featuring work by Chris Paul, Mark Preston, lessLIE, Dorothy Jarvis, Richard Sumner, Edward Joe, Dean Heron, Ron Hamilton Catherine Blackburn, Angelina Gumowe, Dennis Nona and many more. 621 Fort St, 250-383-8224, www.alcheringa-gallery.com.

November 5–13
INTRODUCING BRIGITTE DESBOIS
The Avenue Gallery
A participant in Timeless, a group exhibition featuring paintings by 6 traditionally inspired artists. At 18, Brigitte, returning from France, first earned a living as a silk painting artist and in 1997 her desire to become a full-time artist led her to begin studying classical oil painting at L’Atelier Michel Ange in Quebec City. She then studied in Calgary with John Compton and attended courses and workshops at The Alberta College of Art and Design and Red Deer College, and subsequently at Mission Renaissance Fine Art School. 2184 Oak Bay Ave, 250-598-2184, www.theavenuegallery.com.

November 2015
FOCUS
“IDIOT STRINGS" NINGEOKULUK TEEVEE, 26 X 20 INCHES
CONTEMPORARY NORTH II
November 21–December 5
Madrona Gallery
New drawings from established and emerging Inuit artists. Contemporary Inuit artists continually reevaluate questions about life in the north through a contemporary lens. Shuvinai Ashoona’s often self-reflective drawings encourage the viewer to think about the life of artists in the north. New pieces by Tim Pitsiulak present in large scale the coming together of traditional and modern worlds in Inuit culture. Ningeokuluk Teevee’s expressive drawings focus on the people and animals of the north. Opening Nov 21, 1-4pm. 606 View St, 250-380-4660, www.madronagallery.com.

November 21–22
MEET MURRAY PHILLIPS
Peninsula Gallery
Although this well known Canadian artist has been painting for more than 40 years, much of his life has been lived in the halls of academia where he holds graduate degrees in theology and cultural anthropology. Phillips’ interests are many, including classical guitar and sailing, but an abiding love is painting—and expressing the spiritual in his paintings. The primary focus of his work is the Canadian wilderness. The rich heritage of connection between Canadian artists and the land has never been more important than today when we are losing our relationship with the wilderness and see it primarily as a playground for our high-powered toys. Murray is frequently asked to speak on our relationship with both art and the wilderness. Meet Murray during two days of demo. 100-2506 Beacon Ave, 250-655-1282, www.pengal.com.
"Poppy Delight" by Sabina, 36 x 24 inches, mixed media on canvas

Michael Rozenvain & Sabina
Premiere Victoria Exhibition
November 14 - 26, 2015
1203 Broad Street
250-388-0009
westendgalleryltd.com

THE GALLERY
AT MATTICK’S FARM

“A Child’s Gift” ~ a group show
November 2 thru December 31
Opening Reception Thursday November 19, 4:30-7:30
A portion of the proceeds of the sale of each painting
will be donated in support of BC Children’s Hospital

109-5325 Cordova Bay Road • Open 10am - 5:30pm every day
www.thegalleryatmatticksfarm.com • 250-658-8333

CONJUNCTION
A GROUP EXHIBIT

featuring:
Arlene NESBITT Sheryl FISHER
Francis SULLIVAN Linda DARBY
Alain VINCENT Shelley WITCHIK
Marilyn CHAPMAN Deirdre KELLY
Frances BECKOW Joanne THOMSON
Cameron KUNTZ Yvonne FREIGANG
Tancha DIRICKSON Natalie HUMKA
Shelby ASSENHEIMER Kenna BARRADELL
Donald IUS Margo COOPER Ginny GLOVER

November 17–December 5
Opening Reception: November 19, 7–9pm
2031 Oak Bay Ave • 250 592 2760 • gagegallery.ca
November 5
YONATAN SHAPIRA,
David Strong Building, UVic

The cofounder of Combatants for Peace (CFPeace.org) will present “From the Heart of Zionism—A Story of Hope”. Sponsored by Independent Jewish Voices, KAIROS Victoria and Social Justice Studies UVic. 7-9pm, Room C118. Admission by donation. Info: Linda Taffs 250-532-0093, lttaffs@gmail.com. Facebook: An Evening with Yonatan Shapira.

November 6
LET THE FUR FLY
1831 Fern Street

Victoria Storytellers’ Guild celebrates Canadian Storytelling Night with the Canada-wide theme, “Animals and their Teachings.” 7:30pm, 1831 Fern St (Quakers’ Meeting Hall; parking on Begbie). Admission by donation with all proceeds to Wild Arc Wild Animal Rehabilitation Centre. Refreshments available. Info: Lee Porteous: leeporteous@shaw.ca; 250-370-2964.

November 7 & 8
RESKILLING THE VILLAGE
Two venues


November 10
CEDRIC LITERARY AWARDS GALA
Roundhouse Comm Ctr, Vancouver

The Cedrics acknowledge accomplishment by unpublished BC writers of fiction, creative non-fiction and poetry, including First Nations, in English and French over the age of 50. More than 160 manuscripts were submitted. The awards originated in Victoria and among the shortlist of finalists in its inaugural year are many from Victoria and Vancouver Island, including Margitta Maud, Eileen Hayes, Sarah Kendall, David Giblin, Joel Scott, Margaret Durand, Patrick Shandley, Susan Braley, and Wendy Donawa. Judges: Shirley Alphonse, Yvonne Blomer, Isa Millman, Wendy Morton, Sylvia Olsen, Julie Paul, and Terence Young. Winners in 4 categories will be announced and presented with $3000 each at the Atrium, 7-9pm, 675 Belleville St. Free, but registration required at sales.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca. www.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca.

November 11
CITY TALKS
Interfaith Chapel, UVic

“Let’s Talk About Free Walls: Community Perspectives on Decriminalized Sites of Uncommissioned Public Art.” Panelists include Lisa Helps (Mayor of Victoria), Erik Volet (Trackside Art Gallery), Wendy Welch (Vancouver Island School of Art), Erika Heynman (Wildfire Bakery), and Ken Kelly (Downtown Victoria Business Association). 7:30pm, 630 Yates St. Free: www.thecitytalks.ca.

November 12
MATTHEW WRIGHT
Interfaith Chapel, UVic

In “Contemplative Practice and Non-Dual Consciousness,” this Episcopal priest will lead an examination of a global shift in spiritual understanding, focusing on Christianity. 7pm, near parking lot 6 off Ring Road. Admission by donation. Info: United Chaplain Henri Loc, United Church Campus Ministry, 250-472-4159. www.contemplative.org.

November 13
TEDXFVICTORIA
McPherson Playhouse

The theme for this year’s TEDx Talks is “Impact”. 10am, 3 Centennial Square. Includes an “active space” at City Hall and event in Centennial Square. From $89 at 250-386-6121, www.mts.bc.ca.

November 14
BOOK SALE
Pearkes Recreation Centre


November 15
SHERYL SALLOUM
James Bay New Horizons


November 16
ANTI-COLONIALISM, POST-INDUSTRIALISM, ARTS & CRAFTS
Legacy Art Gallery Downtown

Dr Allan Antill will explore anti-colonial currents in Britain and India which called for humanity to renounce industrial capitalism and state power. 7pm, doors 6:30pm. Free. 630 Yates St, www.legacy.uvic.ca 250-721-6562.

November 17
MERRY & BRIGHT
The Atrium

Intrepid Theatre Club’s annual fundraiser includes live and silent auctions, a complimentary tasting hour and cocktail catering. 6:30pm, 800 Yates St. $45 at door or $40 at 250-590-6291, www.ticketrocket.co.

November 18
THE NATURAL HISTORY OF IAN MCTAGGART COWAN
Royal BC Museum

Launch of The Real Thing: The Natural History of Ian McTaggart Cowan by Briony Penn. The author, curators past and present from the Royal British Columbia Museum and others look at the research, contributions and life of this activist, naturalist and educator. See story in Focus, Oct, 2015. 7-9pm, 675 Belleville St. Free, but registration required at sales.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca. www.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca.

November 19
BUTLER BOOK PRIZE RECIPIENTS

Two Greater Victoria authors were recognized for their literary talent at the October 14, 2015 Victoria Book Prize Awards Gala.

Julie Paul was named the winner of the 12th annual City of Victoria Butler Prize for her short story collection The Pull of the Moon, published by Brindle and Glass. It is a collection of 12 unsettling short stories in which Paul explores the relationships between friends, family, and lovers and examines what happens when secrets are kept and then revealed. Writer/illustrator Chris Tougas was named winner of the 8th annual Bolen Books Children’s Book Prize for Dojo Daycare, published by Owl Kids.

Celebrating its 12th year in 2015, The City of Victoria Butler Book Prize is a partnership between the City of Victoria and Brian Butler of Butler Brothers Supplies. The Bolen Books Children’s Book Prize was founded by Mel Bolen in 2008 to provide authors and illustrators of books for children and youth an increased opportunity for recognition. www.victoriabookprizes.ca.
November 5–21
THE THREEPENNY OPERA
Phoenix Theatre, UVic
Borrowing from the 18th-century The Beggar’s Opera, this work by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill takes aim at the traditional bourgeoisie, revealing a society where law is fickle, money corrupts and crime pays. Ages 16+. Fine Arts district on the west side of campus, outside ring road. 250-721-8000, finearts.uvic.ca.

Continuing to November 7
GRACE & GLORIE
Chemainus Theatre
In a quaint Virginia cottage, a cantankerous 90-year-old faces her final days while her guilt-ridden, big-city caregiver faces her future. 1-800-565-7738, www.chemainustheatrefestival.ca.

Continuing to November 7
HERE: A CAPTIVE ODYSSEY
William Head Institution
Through drama, movement, shadow puppetry and live music, a tale is spun from archival research and oral stories of William Head, with inspiration from the book Quarantined by Peter Johnson. See story, Focus, Oct 2015. Performances 29, 30, 31, Nov 5, 6, 7, 6000 William Head Road, Metchosin. Gates open 6:15pm, close 7:15pm (absolutely no latecomers). Show begins 7:30pm. William Head on Stage is located inside a federal prison. Must be 19+. You may be electronically scanned and searched by a dog. Personal belongings are forbidden and must be left in your car. No smoking materials are permitted. $20 advance only at Windrush Gallery, 4375 Metchosin Rd, and www.whonstage.weebly.com.

November 10–15
MATT & BEN
Roxy Theatre
Atomic Vaudeville presents a play set in 1996 that imagines the finished script for Good Will Hunting falling from the ceiling into Matt Damon and Ben Affleck’s grungy apartment. Written by Mindy Kaling (The Office, The Mindy Show). 8pm, 2657 Quadra St. $22 at 250-590-6291, www.ticketrocket.co.

November 12 & 13
HERE LIES CHRIS
Metro Studio
The return of sketch comedy duo Peter n’ Chris. 8pm, 1411 Quadra St. $15 at door or 250-590-6291, www.ticketrocket.co.

November 14 & 15
Oak Bay Artists’ Studio Tour
Noon-4:30pm
Paintings, pottery, jewellery, textiles, photography and more.
Tour map will be available at: recreation.oakbay.ca

November 18–December 5
DOUBT, A PARABLE
Langham Court Theatre

November 19–22
THE DAISY THEATRE
Metro Studio

November 20–December 31
ELF: THE MUSICAL
Chemainus Theatre
Buddy the Elf discovers he’s actually human, but finding his father and restoring the holiday spirit turns out to be his biggest Christmas surprise. 1-800-565-7738, www.chemainustheatrefestival.ca.

November 20–December 31
PLAYWRIGHTS CABARET
Belfry Arts Centre
Emerging playwrights present stage readings of scenes from their new plays. Strong language; adult content. 8pm, studio A, 1291 Gladstone Ave. Admission by donation. Contact Charles Tidler, 250-386-3786 or ctidler@shaw.ca.

www.focusonline.ca • November 2015
"MIDNIGHT IN PARIS" MICHAEL ROZENVAIN, 36 X 48 INCHES, MIXED MEDIA ON CANVAS
November 7–19
MICHAEL ROZENVAIN & SABINA PREMIERE VIC EXHIBITION
West End Gallery
Both these artists were born and studied in Kiev, Ukraine and now live in Canada. Rozenvain’s vibrant paintings feature cobbled streets, busy café scenes and lively musicians. Captivated by Canadian scenery, Sabina paints landscapes with bright maples, drifting canoes and floral fields bursting with summer colour. Using a palette knife she enhances her bold colours with a thick application of paint and counter balances by using subtle hues in the background. 1203 Broad St, 250-388-0009, www.westendgalleryltd.com.

"CANOE MANED BY VOYAGEURS PASSING A WATERFALL" FRANCES A. HOPKINS, 30 X 60 INCHES, OIL ON CANVAS
Continuing to January 3
THE ARTIST HERSELF
Art Gallery of Greater Victoria
Self-portraits by Canadian historical women artists, spanning pre-Confederation colonialism to the cusp of second-wave feminism. Drawing upon our fascination with self-portraits, The Artist Herself expands the genre’s definition by moving beyond the human face to propose other forms of self-representation, from both settler and Indigenous perspectives. The result is a thought-provoking selection of works by 41 women artists in a range of media. 1040 Moss St, 250-384-4171, www.aggv.ca.

KATHARINE MALTWOOD, HEAD OF CANADA, 1912, PHOTOGRAPH BY MARY MATHESON
Continuing to January 9, with lecture November 26
MAGNA MATER: KATHARINE MALTWOOD AND THE ARTS & CRAFTS MOVEMENT
Legacy Art Gallery Downtown
Learn how the late 19th century Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain influenced the artistic practice of Katharine Maltwood as well as her “discovery” of the Glastonbury Zodiac and how her bequest to UVic helped to build one of the finest Arts and Crafts collections in the country. On Nov 26 at 7pm there will be a talk by Dr Allan Antliff (UVic Art History and Visual Studies) “Anti-Colonialism, Post-Industrialism and the Arts and Crafts.” Free and open to the public. 630 Yates St. 250-721-6562, legacy.uvic.ca.

TEAPOT BY SHARON BUSSARD
November 28
RENEWAL: SHARON BUSSARD GROVE
South Shore Gallery
Show and reception for Sharon Bussard Grove showcasing the spiritual beauty of the useable handmade object. Sharon’s work can be found in numerous private collections nationally and internationally, most notably her work is part of the permanent collection at the Sanbao Ceramic Arts Institute Museum in Jingdezhen, China. She has a BFA from Alberta College of Art and Design and studied Ceramic Arts at Sheridan College of Art and Design. Opening 1-4pm. 2046 Otter Point Rd, 250-642-2058, www.southshoregallery.ca.

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Continuing to January 3
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Contemporary North II
November 21 - December 5
Opening Reception November 21, 1 - 4pm
606 View Street • 250.380.4660 • www.madronagallery.com

“Beyond the Alberta Sky” 36 x 36 inches, acrylic
Michael O’Toole
2506 Beacon Ave, Sidney • 250.655.1282 • www.pengal.com

“Curvaceous” by Catherine Moffat
2184 OAK BAY AVENUE VICTORIA
www.theavenuegallery.com 250-598-2184

“Timeless” November 5 - 13
Catherine Moffat, Tanya Bone, Silvia Armeni
Laura den Hertog, Loretta Fasan, Brigitte Desbois
Opening Reception Nov 5th, 6-8pm

Untitled landscape by Nicotye Samayualie, 25.5 x 50 inches
November 1
AFRICAN CHILDREN’S CHOIR
N. Pentecostal Church

November 1
YOUTH ORCHESTRA
Farquhar Auditorium, UVic
Opening their 30th anniversary season with works by Humperdinck, Debussy and Tchaikovsky. 2:30pm, University Centre. $25/ $22 seniors/$10 students/child. 250-721-8480, www.tickets.uvic.ca.

November 2
ORLI SHAHAM: MOZART
Royal Theatre
The pianist makes her debut with the Victoria Symphony. 8pm, 805 Broughton St. From $30 at 250-386-6121, www.mts.bc.ca.

November 5
FACULTY CONCERT SERIES
Phillip T. Young Hall, UVic
Featuring Suzanne Snizek, flute, with guest Alexandra Li, piano, performing works by Czech composers Martinu, Janacek and Feld. 8pm, McLauren Building. $18/$14 seniors & students at 250-721-8480, www.tickets.uvic.ca.

November 6
THE ARMED MAN:
A MASS FOR PEACE
Farquhar Auditorium, UVic
The Victoria Philharmonic Choir accompanied by the Naden Band of the Royal Canadian Navy. Also performing Philip Moore's setting of Three Prayers of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 8pm, University Centre. $28/ $14 students/15yrs & under free at 250-721-8480, www.tickets.uvic.ca.

November 7
HEY ROSETTA!
McPherson Playhouse
The Newfoundland-based indie rock band plays with guests Yukon Blonde. 8pm. From $35 at 250-386-6121, www.mts.bc.ca.

November 7
MUSIC FOR LADY MELBOURNE
Church of Truth
Les Amusements de la Chambre presents a concert and debut CD release. New and historical repertoire for harpsichord and violin, featuring three sonatas by Bach and two Canadians. 8pm, 111 Superior St. $10-20 at door, Ivy’s Bookshop, or www.amusementsdelachambre.com.

November 8
BEETHOVEN LIVES UPSTAIRS
Royal Theatre
In this Victoria Symphony Concert for Kids, life gets a little noisy and a whole lot more interesting for young Christopher after a crabbly, eccentric old man named Beethoven moves in upstairs. 2:30pm, 805 Broughton St. From $20 at 250-386-6121, www.mts.bc.ca.

November 9-12
JAZZ SHOWCASE SERIES
Hermann’s Jazz Club
On behalf of Jazz Festivals Canada, Victoria Jazz Society is facilitating a Showcase Series with jazz groups from across the country. Nov 9: Triple Bill: Jérôme Beaulieu Trio, Emma Frank, Kely MacNay Quintet; Nov 10: Nick La Rive Band; Nov 11: Blue Moon Marquee & David Vest; Nov 12: Dan Brubeck Quartet. All shows 8pm (doors 6pm), 753 View St. Tickets: VIS office (202-345 Quebec St.; 250-388-4423), Lyle’s Place and Hermann’s Jazz Club. www.jazzvictoria.ca.

November 12
BAHAMAS
McPherson Playhouse
The Finnish-Canadian musician (Afie Jurvainen) performs with guest John K. Samson. 8pm, From $37.50 at 250-386-6121, www.mts.bc.ca.

November 14
AFTERNOON WITH MOZART
St Mary’s the Virgin Church
A concert by the DieMahler Chamber Group. 2:30pm, 1701 Elgin Rd. $25 at 250-386-6121, www.mts.bc.ca.

November 14
ORGAN CONCERT
St. Andrews Presbyterian Church

November 14
MARCIO FARACO
Hermann’s Jazz Club
The Paris-based Brazilian master acoustic guitarist/ singer-songwriter. 8pm, 753 View St. $32.50 at 250-386-6121, www.mts.bc.ca.

November 14
SWITHUN!
Alix Goolden Hall
French early music group Dialogos explores early polyphony through a musical narrative involving Swithun, saint of all miracles. See story page 36. 8pm, 907 Pandora Ave. $30 at 250-386-6121, www.mts.bc.ca.

November 15
LAFAYETTE STRING QUARTET
Phillip T. Young Hall, UVic
UVic’s quartet-in-residence performs works by Shostakovich and Dvorák. 2:30pm, MacLauren Building. $25 at 250-721-8480, www.tickets.uvic.ca.

November 20
LEE HARVEY OSMOND
Upstairs Cabaret
Lee Harvey Osmond, aka Tom Wilson, is a Canadian rocker and the progenitor of “acid-folk.” 7:30pm, 15 Bastion Square. $32 at door or $29 at Lyle’s Place, Vic Jazz Society (202-345 Quebec St; 250-388-4423), www.mts.bc.ca.

November 21
ALEXANDER DUNN
Phillip T. Young Hall, UVic
The classical guitarist performs adaptations of lute and cello works by Bach, Wilcocks, Tunna. 8pm, McLauren, $18/ $14 at 250-721-8480, www.tickets.uvic.ca.

November 21
JAYME STONE
First Metropolitan U. Church
Stone’s collaboration with North American roots musicians reimagines traditional music. 7pm, 932 Balmoral Rd. $25 at door or $20 at 250-590-6291, www.ticketrocket.co.

November 21 & 22
EHNES & MAHLER 5
Royal Theatre

November 22
LINDEN SINGERS
Lutheran Church of the Cross
A concert featuring Rutter’s Requiem accompanied by a small ensemble with David Stratakousas at the organ. 2:30pm, 3787 Cedar Hill Rd. $20/ under 25 free. www.lindensingers.ca.

November 26–December 16
ADVENT CONCERT SERIES
St Mary’s Anglican Church
First Advent: 12: Dan Brubeck Quartet. All shows 8pm. Nov 26: Mixed Choral Programme; Nov 27:choir of St. Mary’s Anglican Church; Nov 29: Legacy Children’s Choir, Featuring Suzanne Snizek, flute, with guest Alexandra Li, piano, performing works by Czech composers Martinu, Janacek and Feld. 8pm, McLauren Building. $25 at 250-386-6121, www.mts.bc.ca.

November 27
MICHAEL KAESHAMMER
McPherson Playhouse
The Canadian pianist, vocalist and composer will showcase boogie-woogie, blues and jazz with his 6-member band. 7:30pm, 3 Centennial Square. From $32 at 250-386-6121, www.mts.bc.ca.

November 27
VIC CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
First Metropolitan Church
With guest soloist Josiah Layne, Harp. 8pm, 932 Balmoral Road (at Quadra). $20/ 15 seniors & students / music students free at Long & McQuade, Ivy’s Books, www.victoriachamberorchestra.org, and door.

November 28
UVIC JAZZ ENSEMBLE
Phillip T. Young Hall, UVic
Celebrating Thelonious Monk. 8pm, MacLauren Building. This concert will be broadcast live on CFUV 101.9 FM. www.cfuw.uvic.ca. $15/$10 at 250-721-8480, www.tickets.uvic.ca.

November 28
VIC BAROQUE PLAYERS
St John the Divine Church
Choral and Instrumental works for the season of Advent by Bach, Vivaldi, and Buxtehude. 7:30pm, 1611 Quadra St. $28/25.5 at Ivy’s Bookshop, Munro’s Books, Long & McQuade, 250-652-0116. www.victoria-baroque.com.

November 29
J.S. BACH & SONS
St Elizabeth’s Catholic Church
The Sidney Classical Orchestra, featuring Victoria pianist Robert Holliston. 2:30pm, 10030 Third St, Sidney. Info/reserved tickets: 250-480-1133.

Sunday nights in November
FOLK MUSIC CONCERTS
Norway House

Throughout November
UVIC MUSIC EVENTS
Phillip T. Young Hall, UVic
Concerts, lectures, workshops and recitals featuring School of Music faculty, students and guests. Several free and by donation events. Full listings at www.finearts.uvic.ca/music/events.
dance

November 6 & 7
BALLET MEETS BROADWAY
Royal Theatre
Ballet Victoria joins the Victoria Symphony on the Pops stage for the first time in a concert featuring music from Broadway classics like Chicago, A Chorus Line, Carousel and West Side Story. Nov 6: 8pm; Nov 7: 2pm & 8pm, 805 Broughton St. From $30 at 250-386-6121, www.rmts.bc.ca.

November 13 & 14
BALLET BC: 30TH ANNIVERSARY
Royal Theatre
Ballet BC celebrates 30 years with a triple bill program that includes renowned choreographers Crystal Pite (Victoria), Stijn Celis (Belgium) and Caeytano Soto (Spain) and 14 finely trained ballet dancers. Presented by Dance Victoria. 7:30pm. On new ticket orders, 30-year-olds get free admission. Otherwise from $29 at 250-386-6121, www.rmts.bc.ca.

November 28
HAREM
McPherson Playhouse
Sacred Centre Dance artistic director Nath Keo choreographs in Turkish, Egyptian, fusion and contemporary belly dance styles in homage to the harems of the Ottoman Empire and their history of cultural fusion. 8pm. $30 at 250-386-6121, www.rmts.bc.ca.

film

November 4
AWARENESS FILM NIGHT
Edward Milne Comm School, Sooke
Unacceptable Levels examines the seamy side of the chemical revolution that began in the 1940s. The film and the post screening Q&A will look at how to avoid those hidden chemicals in our food, the products we use and the air we breathe. 7-9pm, 6218 Sooke Rd. By donation. www.awarenessfilmnight.ca.

November 17
FIRE IN THE BLOOD
Cadboro Bay United Church
A bitter tale of how the West blocked the sale of lifesaving AIDS drugs to Africa and how activists fought back. 7pm, 2625 Arbutus Rd. Donations welcome. Sponsored by the church and Grandmothers Advocacy Network. 250-477-2715.

Mondays in November
MOVIE MONDAYS
Eric Martin Pavilion
Nov 2: In the Turn, the story of a 10-year-old transgender girl who is embraced by roller derby culture; Nov 9: For the Moment; Nov 16: Inside Out; Nov 23: Love and Mercy; Nov 30: The Backward Class. Screenings at 6:30pm, Fort St. by Lee Ave. By donation. More at www.moviemondays.ca.

Throughout November
MOVIE SCREENINGS
Vic Theatre
Most screenings at 4, 7 or 9pm, 808 Douglas St. Listings at www.thevic.ca.

Introduction to Teilhard de Chardin with Margaret Walters
4 Tuesdays, Nov 3 - 24, 10am - 12pm, $75 or $20 drop in Friends Meeting House, 1831 Fern Street

Film screening: Journey of the Universe by Brian Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker with Gertie Jocksch SC DMin
Thursday, Nov 5, 7 - 8:30pm, $15
Royal Roads University, 2005 Sooke Road
Register at www.royalroads.ca/continuing-studies

Dancing for Wellbeing with Joanne Cuffe
Saturday, Nov 7, 10 - 4pm, $70, please bring your lunch
Friends Meeting House, 1831 Fern Street
Please do not let cost deter you from attending. Ask us about our scholarships.
earthliteracies@gmail.com
250-220-4601 • www.earthliteracies.org

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earthliteracies@gmail.com
250-220-4601 • www.earthliteracies.org
Jaunty, popular songs from 100 years ago bear so little resemblance to the strains of what today’s teens are yearning to on their iPhones that it’s hard to believe the top hits of both 1915 and 2015 foundationally share something in common. They do, though, since both employ polyphony, defined as “a texture consisting of two or more simultaneous lines of independent melody.”

If you go back 1000 years, you can find the earliest known polyphonic songs. And if you go to Alix Goolden Hall in the middle of this month, you can hear them performed live as part of the Early Music Society of the Islands’ concert series.

Dialogos, a widely celebrated early music ensemble from France, has fortunately added Victoria to its North American tour this fall, which also includes stops in Vancouver, New York, and Yale University in Connecticut. Four unaccompanied female voices comprise the group performing Swithin! Music from Winchester, c. 1000, which celebrates the miracles of England’s revered Saint Swithun.

Founded in 1997 by director and singer Katarina Livljanic, Dialogos’ website explains that the group’s projects “link new musicological research with an innovative approach to medieval music performance, a theatrical dimension, and an expressive musicality. Dialogos is composed of women’s or men’s vocal ensembles, depending on each specific project.”

The Early Music Society of the Island’s Artistic Director James Young says EMSI is especially excited to tackle Victoria onto the group’s Vancouver leg, since their inventive performances and crystalline sound give voice to the most ancient Western polyphonic repertoire being performed today. “They’d been on our radar for a while,” he says. “They’re one of the most exciting European ensembles specializing in early music, and we were very happy to take advantage of this opportunity.”

Young says that EMSI’s mandate is to put together offerings that span eight centuries. “We try to include at least one Medieval program each year, and it’s almost always going to be vocal or largely vocal.” He compares what symphony-goers get—a sampling from about 200 years of music, all of it composed for symphonies—to the historical and cultural richness of early music programmes. “If you come to our 2015-16 season, there are 800 years of music there, everything from unaccompanied voices to fortepiano.”

Dialogos performs other early vocal repertoire as well, but Swithin! was the standout option Young wanted to introduce to Island audiences. “This is the one that grabbed me. It’s the earliest polyphony, and the fascinating stories about St Swithun—a medieval ‘superman’ cult figure of the 10th century—these were the appealing aspects of the programme that made us choose this one.”

Critics from across the globe have been wowed by Dialogos, and Swithin! specifically. Scotland’s Herald reported, “As an aural and visual experience it was one of the most moving events of this year’s Festival.” David Gordon Duke of the Vancouver Sun exclaimed, “I was astonished and delighted…” And the New York Times resolutely declared, “[Director] Ms Livljanic has assembled a work so magnificent and moving that its resemblance to what medieval listeners might have heard is beside the point.”
Swithun! is the earliest known preserved example of polyphony, and was composed in Winchester, England around 1050. “Wulfstan the Cantor” narrates the journey of a man plagued by visionary dreams, trying to outrun three Furies, and who ultimately finds salvation via Swithun, saint of all miracles.

“What will make the program more accessible to the audience is the surtitles that appear above the singers to explain the story,” says Young. Some verses are in Latin, and some are in Anglo-Saxon, a language that is “essentially unintelligible to modern English speakers. Occasionally you’ll sort of get a word or a couple of words.”

The resonance of the hall is as much a part of the musical performance as the resonance of the voices in a concert such as this one, where four a capella singers will be the only sound in the room. Alix Goolden Hall will not disappoint on this front, says Young. “This is a super venue for this kind of music. Almost all the musicians we present love Alix Goolden; many have said it’s the best hall in Canada for this kind of music, and for this concert in particular, it’s just going to be spectacular.”

The scale of the hall, and the layout of the audience seating is another aspect of this concert that Young feels will leave those in attendance fully sated, both musically and emotionally. “All the seats have excellent sight lines because of the way they are in a semi circle. Everybody is very close to the artists, and it makes for a very intimate experience. It will be magical to hear it in this kind of space.”

Young feels that the performers are likely to feel the same. “I’m sure they’re going to rave about the acoustics in there. When you’re on tour, you never know what you’re going to wind up in. Many European artists who come through Victoria are very surprised to find out there is such a wonderful hall here in Victoria.”

The Romanesque revival, late-19th Century Methodist church was specifically designed for the congregation who commissioned the building, who had a strong music program as a foundational part of their services. Young says no matter what the intention, every space has its own unique character of sound reverberation, just as seemingly identical violins or guitars can have very different “voices.”

“Even today, with modern science, it’s a bit of a crapshoot what the acoustics of a building will sound like once it’s built,” he says. “But this hall is absolutely ideal for early music.”

Early Music Society of the Islands presents Dialogos, performing “Swithun! Music from Winchester c.1000” on Saturday, Nov 14, 8pm Alix Goolden Hall. Doors open at 6:45 pm, pre-concert talk 7:10 pm. Tickets $30, at rmts.bc.ca or by calling 250-386-6121.

Mollie Kaye remembers her own magical a capella experience, hearing the Tallis Scholars perform Byrd’s Three Masses in a Gothic church in Rome during the summer of 1987.
Saying big things small
MONICA PRENDERGAST

Ronnie Burkett returns to town this month with his puppets and improvisational-style theatre.

There are a number of countries in the world, following an original initiative by Japan, which designate certain people to be “Living National Treasures.” These treasures are artists or crafts persons who have achieved high levels of excellence and significantly contributed to national and international culture. If we had such a program in Canada one of the first theatre artists I would nominate is Theatre of Marionettes founder Ronnie Burkett.

I have seen a number of Burkett’s productions and each time my appreciation of his artistry as actor, playwright and designer increases. I find his shows to be beautiful, funny, sad, occasionally shocking and always amazing. But this is not just my opinion. Burkett is one of the most lauded theatre artists in the country. He won the 2009 Siminovitch Prize, our most prestigious national theatre arts award, for his puppet design work. His performances in New York earned him an OBIE award. He has a long list of stellar reviews and other awards that have been earned since he founded Theatre of Marionettes in 1986.

Burkett has not performed in Victoria for many years, although he regularly visits Vancouver (where I often head to catch his latest shows). Luckily, Intrepid Theatre is bringing Burkett and his latest one-man show The Daisy Theatre to the Metro Theatre from November 19-22 for four performances.

I saw Daisy Theatre in Vancouver last year, as Burkett has been touring his cabaret-style puppet revue across the country and overseas for the past two years, to great acclaim. This past year alone the show has been seen in Los Angeles, New York, and New Zealand.

I spoke with Burkett, who lives in Toronto, by phone recently. We discussed many topics including his evolution as a playwright (his plays are published by Playwrights Canada Press), his changing relationship with audiences and his thoughts on where his practice is taking him.

Burkett writes and performs all his plays as solo pieces, albeit with dozens of roles played by his exquisitely hand carved and jointed wooden marionettes. Asked if he thinks of himself as a playwright, he replied that he had grown to think of himself as a writer when “I realized I wanted to discuss things rather than to perform fairy tales. It’s the writing I love the most. It is such a solitary existence, writing. I don’t have to be on, so it is a very singular activity that I love.”

We talked about how the themes of his plays emerged. Burkett’s plays are often very funny but can also be quite dark. In thinking about the ones I have seen, these are plays filled with childhood innocence lost in a rabid world, characters faced with or dealing with mortality and death, loneliness and a longing for human connection. Definitely not the stereotypical Punch and Judy fare we might think of as puppet theatre!

Burkett told me that he has always felt puppetry to be “subversive and dangerous as an art form, seemingly silly but with a knife underneath it. I consider puppetry to be a superior performing art form because it allows you to say big things small.” I asked about the darkness that can pervade his plays. Penny Plain, for example, preceded The Daisy Theatre and is an apocalyptic story of a little blind woman and her dog facing the breakdown of society, violent anarchy, and the end of the world. With puppets. He replied: “I understood earlier than many people I know that all of this is leading to death. The AIDS crisis decimated my social community and for my generation was equivalent to World War II. Death is part of the deal we are dealt. I have to laugh constantly, but I have always felt the sadness of the world.”

The Daisy Theatre is a much lighter production than these earlier plays, and has allowed Burkett to take new artistic risks. Primarily, it has changed his relationship with his audiences. With growing success, Burkett found himself performing in larger theatres and began to feel the lack of intimacy that smaller venues can provide. He decided to return to his roots, starting out in Calgary in the 1980s and experimenting with puppetry, learning its rich history and exploring the form.

He explained, “Daisy Theatre was supposed to be a one-off but I learned that its improvisational style is what audiences right now
RONNIE BURKETT sees puppetry as “subversive and dangerous as an art form, seemingly silly but with a knife underneath it.”

want to see, that it gives us a chance to learn about each other. There is nothing more in the moment than not having a script, and it reminds me of my early days. Audiences want to feel they are part of something, so this show is teaching me how to engage with audiences in authentic ways.”

*The Daisy Theatre* is inspired by European puppetry practice, particularly the kinds of dissident revue shows seen in the former Czechoslovakia during the World War II and Cold War eras. Volunteers are invited on stage to assist Burkett’s cabaret performers enact their moment in the limelight. It might be Esmé Messengill, aging cabaret star, or Schnitzel, the childlike puppet who wishes he had wings, or Edna Rural, the Alberta housewife who sits in her armchair and tells us about the death of her husband. Night to night Burkett chooses which puppets will appear and how the audience can support these diverse characters sing their song, dance their dance, or tell their story.

The show is a *tour de force*, as always with Burkett, very funny and often risqué. It can also be deeply touching, as we play our essential role in Burkett’s process: “My definition of puppetry, building on how one of my mentors defined it, is the shape of an idea in motion, witnessed.”

The witnessing role is the part an audience plays in any live performance, and this responsibility feels pervasive when faced with the deep empathy that Burkett’s creations often draw out of unsuspecting audiences. How can I be crying over a puppet? This is a question I have come to accept and take as given when I go to a Theatre of Marionettes show. And as light as *The Daisy Theatre* is compared to other Burkett productions, there are moments of real emotional depth amidst the laughter.

The discoveries Burkett has been making whilst touring *Daisy Theatre* include finding out that audiences in very different cultural locations have almost universal responses to his characters. As he points out, “There is an Edna Rural everywhere, and Schnitzel is a kind of Everyman. We really are all the same, in spite of our current government’s divisive policies telling us how different we are. We are all here sitting around a campfire telling a story. And I am feeling the audience thinking and listening.”

Burkett finishes our conversation by telling me a little bit about his next project, *Forget Me Not*. It will be a small-scale play with fewer than 100 audience members per night. The show will take place with the audience onstage with Burkett, participating as puppeteers alongside him to explore issues of race. Burkett reflects on this risky undertaking that, “I am a 58-year-old gay white man talking about race. I need to listen.”

I for one will be there to listen and learn with the Living National Treasure that is Ronnie Burkett.

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Monica has learned much from her recent work with William Head on Stage’s *HERE: A Captive Odyssey*. She urges readers to book their ticket soon for Burkett’s show at the Metro (November 19-22). If it sells out they can catch it at The Cultch in Vancouver from December 1-20.
Q uestions can be a strange weight. From early insistent childhood, we ask in wonderment: Why? How? As we get older and are initiated into life’s more painful realities—like loss, loneliness, injustice—those simple questions become more heavily freighted, as frustration and even anger mix in with our lingering awe at the world. In her new collection He Leaves His Face in the Funeral Car (Caitlin Press), Governor General Award winner Arleen Paré shows us how seemingly small packets of poetry, with language that is at once filament flexible and titanium tough, can receive and help carry the weight of those questions.

Now retired and living in Victoria, Paré worked for over two decades in Vancouver social services, particularly mental health housing. It was there, in a world heavy with file folders and the sometimes tragic lives they held, that she began writing. Her first book, Paper Trail (2007), was shortlisted for the Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize and won the Victoria Butler Book Prize—an award she was nominated for again for last year’s Lake of Two Mountains, which also earned the Governor General’s Award for poetry.

“It was the best gift,” Paré says, still almost laughing over the unexpectedness of the GG win. “I don’t come out of writing at all. I come out of social work. There you get a job description that’s set, and you do the job as best you can; you understand the terms. With writing you don’t know. What are the terms?”

That’s a question Paré’s new work subtly asks about living as well, for it’s a job we all have to do, but with no clear terms of reference. Thus she explores a multiplicity of perspectives, from the playful pear which “is not fooled unlike an orange/ a pear knows which end is up” to a hospitalized aunt’s strange post-stroke stories that Paré describes as “contingent on sightlines _perspectives_ angles of uncertain faith.”

In this, her first unthemed book, Paré delights in those shifting sightlines. Whether it’s carefully naming the leaking, seeping, poisonous trials endured by water or the profuse “lush eruptions” of mushrooms that vanish, leaving only a list of fanciful names to fill the mouth, her ranging vision celebrates experience in all its messiness. As she says in a poem about one of her sons: “Not every script reads left to right.”

While life may not read left to right, Paré shows that there is always meaningful connection—sometimes in time, sometimes defying time and even space. Take, for example, the title poem. She writes about riding in the funeral car after her father’s death, reflecting on “My face, which is my father’s/… he wills me for as long as I need.” Where do things come from? Where do they go? No longer childlike questions when we lose those we love.

“I’m a little bit tethered to the question of provenance for us as human beings,” Paré explains. “What is this business about? Philosophers say there’s no beginning and no end. And I go: ‘Hey, wait a minute. I have a beginning and an end.’ It’s very odd to have a personal beginning and try to fit that into a context of no beginning. It’s not something I’m pleased about.” Neither a religious believer nor an atheist, Paré says she’s more skeptical, and she is annoyed at the fact that some of our questions seem just…unanswerable. “I love that scientists try to follow this down to little points and then—nothing. But the issue of provenance, why we don’t know, makes me a little cross,” she laughs.

“I think all of us have this funny little floating question of: Why? How?”

And she applies that questioning yet awestruck eye to everything, right down to the interstellar dust from which we are made. To me, an exemplary poem in the collection is “In Nomine Dust.” Looking at dust in all its forms, as our family even, it tries to name “its genus, its everyday and other names too./Cinders and sand, hair, crusts of bread/ all collapse in one direction./ Conjugate dust’s provenance,/ particulates, formal and vernacular, everlasting./ De moleculorum…Collect its human names, in particular, the dying and the dead,/ its given names:/Adelaide and Celestine, for example…Coming apart under the speckled sky./We are cradles, graves, floating/this froth of stars. Thinking ourselves whole/but knowing/ourselves particulate,/in pax vobiscum [peace be with you], essential grit.”

Within the questions of origins and endings, Paré explores tiny but sometimes momentous moments of intersection, where we connect unexpectedly—via dust, in a glance, a glancing touch, a touching talk. Of a man she’d see out her windshield weekdays, just after dawn, she
“IT’S VERY HARD for us to manage keeping boundaries and keeping the heart open at the same time. Poetry actually helps to manage it.” —Arlene Paré

says simply: “we meet not meeting.” Paré reminds us, importantly, that our lives mysteriously speak to each other constantly—like at her former job with the supposedly defined terms. Even there, Paré still found deeply affecting mysteries. “What are the answers?” she asks me, as we discuss the poem “For the Record,” which presents a gentle catalogue of suicides. “These are real incidents,” Paré notes, somberly. “These were all people who had been referred to me for housing [their names have been changed]. The juxtaposition of our lives—it’s hard to reconcile. But that’s the deal. How do we walk through our lives as we always do and then walk downtown and see people, with all kinds of things going on, sitting on the street asking for our change? I mean, how do we do this?”

For Paré, with an MFA in creative writing from UVic who also sits on the board at Victoria Cool Aid Society, one way is to write. “It’s very hard for us to manage keeping boundaries and keeping the heart open at the same time,” she admits. “Poetry actually helps to manage it. For me as somebody who writes poetry, it’s useful. I think reading poetry does that too, in a way. All we can do as humans is to try to get a little bead on that really messy, beyond-us experience so we’re not overwhelmed all the time. It’s so overwhelming! Poetry: it’s little, but it holds so much.”

In the case of this new book, Paré’s poetry holds nothing less than the entire state of being, in constant beautiful and frustrating creation and decay—“Dust to dust, endless, even in this/the poem’s amplifying chamber, endlessness/having entered time and all these words.”

Writer and editor Amy Reiswig finds it indeed a mysteriously intersecting world in learning that she and Paré lived on the same Montreal street, got married at the same age and went to two of the same schools. Amy will also never view dusting the same way again.
A friend reminisces that back around 1970, when we both arrived, there was literally one visible Victoria “street person,” whose image I can conjure to this day, though not his all-in-the-family-era name (Cliff? Ralph? Stanley?): a tall, grizzled, indeterminately-aged, spastic-limbed panhandler who, at various pub entrances—principally, the Churchill on Government Street, near Morris Tobacconists—would make his lurching approach toward passersby and exiting beer hall patrons, never begging but asking in a repetitive sing-song: “I work around the house for a dollar.” Given his uncertain control of his limbs, it seemed safer to give him spare change than a job, which may have been the point. Whether he was homeless or just a “business-hours” beggar is unknown to me.

Forty-five years on, he’s a panhandler no more, but feasting, I’m sure, at God’s long table. Victoria has survived his presence, seen ’seventies hippies morph into real estate salespeople, witnessed Eaton’s crawl to the retailer’s bone yard, and by steady increments become less exclusively the home of a generation of “nearly-dead,” cane-assisted pensioners, and more the mailing address of a new wave of active retirees (a shopper demographic, I believe), urban professionals and telecommuting executives, a large creative and consulting community, the occasional young person (we control their numbers with OFF! spray), and everyone else craving Canada’s least punishing weather and most forgiving social environment. Victoria has become less quaint, charming and village-like, more a city. Local real estate values have gone stratospheric and alternative health practitioners are a dime a dozen, though you wouldn’t know it from their fee schedules. Healing and protection of people—I say this with a minimum of sarcasm—may always have been our soft city’s destiny.

As nurturing and edgeless as things may be here, the wide world is astir, and the air is heavy with risk. Let me be candid: Have you ever looked the Devil in the eye? Have we ever looked the Devil in the eye? If we ever did, we somewhat shamefully averted our gaze. We’ve been educated, ironed, repressed, made to conform to the increasingly hard-to-miss socio-economic crack in our local paradise, visible, sometimes quite literally, behind the next Garry oak: park tenting, street begging, shopping-cart homelessness and parking lot camping—a great deal of it—its epicenter Downtown, but with long lines radiating into our neighbourhoods.

Ask yourself: passing sad or Dickensian foretaste in these eerie times?

We study history, understand it as a record of our patterns, accept the principle of historical recrudescence, promise with high-minded speeches to learn from our missteps, and then, oblivious to all of that, run our lives on the same blundering assumptions and self-interests, turned away from the fact that history is reality’s operating manual. This paradox is understandable because bad news is never about us, only what happens to other people.

Or, as Otis sang, you don’t miss your water ’til your well runs dry.

I’ve never been hungry or cold a day in my life, never lacked for a night’s shelter, or skills to market. I don’t talk with imaginary friends, don’t rock back and forth on my haunches, uttering ritualized gibberish. My body doesn’t scream for drugs or booze. I don’t pedal around Downtown’s streets on a bike, selling crack or heroin. I don’t eat soup mix boosted from a convenience store. I’m not a predator. My parents didn’t hector or diminish me, or drop kick me into a hard world—I’m not broken. I generate repartee sprinkled with irony and welschmerz so rarified and entertaining that I’m almost a party act. I’m educated, coherent, hard-working, publically engaged—a model citizen, just like you.

Know what I think? There, but for the grace of God…

So how exactly does it work? For them? How do people who started out with a head and the standard 20 digits get to such a place of lousy self-image and collapse of ego that they are able to take up a piece of sidewalk and remain planted there for several hours until…what? Some drugs are sold or scored? Or the high wears off? Until the pity or shame of passersby turns into a quarter, a dollar, five? Until a buddy comes by with a six-pack or some distracting idea, or the need to defecte forces a visit to the public washroom in Centennial Square or some alley or city green-space? Until the cops or someone else with a uniform and a scowl moves you along, or a shopkeeper comes out with curses and threats? Or it’s mealtime at some nearby social serving agency?

Bad brains? Bad childhood? Bad attitude? Bad luck?

In stop-and-start traffic on Douglas Street, about 9 one weekday morning, I inch past a pile of rags mounded against one of our blue heritage-style lampposts outside Subway, between Yates and Johnson. At the last moment I realize that the mound of rags features a head of hair resting on the sidewalk. The mound moves amorously as some human creature within adjusts its sleeping position.
I THINK THE PRESENCE of so many beggars crashed in front of convenience stores, so much flyblown humanity pushing shopping carts mounded with crap…is an expression of social collapse and a slowly but visibly spreading social cancer.

Passing that way again late morning, I see the owner of the hair, a woman, forty-ish, now slumped against the Subway wall, surrounded by her rags, begging for change.

“Want to Survive End of Days?” “Gene, Will You Survive The Coming Social Collapse?” “Chemical Cleanser For the Bugs In Your Brain?” asks the junk in my email inbox. Here’s a simpler, more immediate supplication: “Keep me off Douglas Street.”

To be fair, it’s not each and every street. But in the right light and at the right hour, it’s possible to get the feeling that by increments, Downtown’s streets are turning into asylum corridors. It never breaks out as social eruption. No, it’s insidious; it’s just…there. Meanwhile, middle-class shoppers, way past their “urban adventure” years, vote with their wheels and head to Uptown and the Superstore. And besides, the street people, where would you send ’em, what would you do with ’em? Uh, house ’em?

I think the presence of so many beggars crashed in front of convenience stores, so much flyblown humanity pushing shopping carts mounded with crap (I exclude those productively collecting deposit containers) is an expression of social collapse and a slowly but visibly spreading social cancer. I think the appropriation of public parks—everything from Beacon Hill Park to some tiny neighbourhood oasis on Caledonia—as camping and tenting and crashing space is socially damaging, destructive of community tone and well-being, and a full-colour snapshot of response failure.

I believe it indicts us. I worry there’s payback for inaction.

Sure, it’s all Harper’s fault. The vanishing funding. His nastiness. Everything’s Harper’s fault. I bit my lip yesterday gnawing on a pork chop bone. Harper’s (or his successor’s) fault, but God knows, not my own.

Small blessings: We can calculate the number of street-living, shopping-cart-pushing chronically homeless—350 or so, or about one per thousand of the regional population. The number isn’t overwhelming, and it doesn’t make a response impossible.

All of which makes so revealing the prevailing tone of the hundred-plus comments following the Times Colonist’s [OR our almost-daily newspaper’s] recent story about Mayor Lisa Helps who, if you missed the news, “paid” a $20 stipend to each of about 350 homeless to attend a forum/workshop to consider positive housing responses. Predictably, readers’ anger surfaced: Helps is a commie, a socialist, a fool, Victoria’s worst mayor ever. Ditto councillors Ben Isitt and Jeremy Loveday.

Funny, I see Helps as a model of enterprise, prescient about the need for timely reinvestment. She reckons the social costs and the cost to the Downtown economy of the visible presence of the homeless who come from the region and beyond, and proposes to direct regional financial resources to alleviate the problem. Find the stupid in that.

There is an interesting feature to the structure of everyday life: Worries remain hairline cracks, neglected until they turn into chasms. It’s hard to get sufficient attention, to isolate and focus, to marshal resources, to act. A lot of social noise gets in the way of a constructive response: “Yeah, they have no skills, but they sure know how to work the system.” “Hey, Victoria has all the provincial government jobs and the tourist dollars, so fuck ‘em, let ‘em deal with the street people.” “The blue bridge, sewage treatment, homeless housing—when is this taxpayer rape going to stop?”

Recent CRD reports paint an uneasy picture: Thousands of regional households are living on the margins of housing affordability in our pricey little town. It’s a thin and porous membrane, and some folks are a paycheque away from eviction. When people are living on margins that narrow, any economic judder can shake them off. So, how about 700 homeless? Or 1500? 1500’s a nice number. It trips off the tongue.

Me, I like zero. There but for the grace of God.

Gene Miller is a founder of Open Space Cultural Centre, Monday Magazine and the Gaining Ground Conferences. He currently serves on the Mayor’s Task Force on Housing Affordability.
Back in the late 1990s I learned of a legendary property in West Saanich that a few lucky UVic students lived on each September through April. On tiny Maltby Lake, there was a large house for communal living and a smaller off-the-grid cottage for a couple. When I finally visited one fall, the students renting from caretakers and part-owners Woody and Carmel Thomson were playing banjo on the lake’s dock, stoking the woodstove and exploring the hand-cut trails that circle the lake and fan out through its forests. The paths wound through Douglas fir and cedar laden glades, into open meadows of Garry oak and moss and along headwater streams for the Tod Creek watershed. I thought I had stumbled on paradise.

The Thomsons, it seems, felt the same. In the midst of growing pressures from developers and ecosystem fragmentation region-wide, their recent efforts have helped safeguard Maltby Lake as one of the last undisturbed ecosystems in the Capital Region, and certainly the most untouched example in Saanich. After their success, however, two questions remain: Will the whole lake remain protected? And what should protection look like given the region’s growing population?

In April of this year the BC Supreme Court ruled that the Thomsons could formalize a deal with The Land Conservancy of BC (TLC) to purchase 29 percent of the jointly-owned property (they previously owned 10 percent). An additional 6 percent still belongs to the TLC, which recently sold several of its properties to satisfy creditors and regain financial solvency. The landmark decision saw the TLC’s Court Monitor ultimately place a higher priority on ecological than economic value (other offers were refused because of the ecological covenants the Thomsons agreed to place on their portion). The $750,000 the Thomsons paid will ensure their share of their extended family’s property transfers before or upon their death to the municipality of Saanich or a land conservation organization; the covenants will help guard against development.

Though most laud the decision as a success story, only time will tell the ultimate outcome for Maltby. “The best outcome would be to have the whole property and lake protected,” Carmel Thomson tells me in their kitchen. “We’re hopeful that others in the family will come on board.” The property is unusual in that its owners do not hold fee simple title, but rather share their interest, a fact that hinders the placement of environmental covenants or creation of a park, but has also helped protect the property from development (as all owners have to agree on any changes). The Holmes and Dumberton families bought Maltby Lake from J.D. Pemberton, a Hudson’s Bay surveyor who completed the last leg of his journey to Victoria by canoe in 1851. Pemberton, Woody Thomson’s great-great grandfather, later started Pemberton & Son, a real estate and engineering firm. The families joined through marriage in 1917.

Maltby Lake lies about 30 minutes by car from downtown Victoria. Just north of the triangle intersection that connects Prospect Lake Road and Munn Road, the 172-acre property surrounds the 21 acre lake at its centre. The lake supports a population of rare freshwater jellyfish and sponges which, biologist Ian Bruce writes, have existed since the area rebounded from the compression of glaciation and the lake separated from Tod Inlet, thousands of years ago. The property also contains cutthroat trout, painted turtles, Pacific tree frogs, 18 listed species and the largest Douglas fir on record in Saanich (estimated to be 600 years old).

Woody and Carmel live in a converted barn on the property, a small wood-sided building with firewood stacked in the kitchen and desks piled with files and books. When I visited, the forest was quiet, the fall migration of songbirds already underway. The lake was a glowing pool surrounded by dry Douglas fir, creaking in summer’s last heat. “I was born here,” says Woody, “and as soon as high school was done in Ontario, I scampered back.” They have lived on Maltby together for 31 years, since Woody, a retired forest service photographer and filmmaker, met Carmel, a writer and researcher. Last year the Thomsons received a Saanich Environmental Award for Long-Term Achievement in recognition of their work to protect Maltby Lake.

The vision the Thomsons have for the lake places ecological integrity higher than public use, a fine balance that’s easily destroyed. For proof one need only look to other regional lakes, like Elk and Beaver Lakes, which have yearly problems with fecal coliform levels and agricultural pollution, or Durrance Lake, which is a sea of floaty toys and swimmers on sunny summer days. The Thomson’s vision raises questions about how best to coexist in a region with both spectacular natural beauty and a burgeoning population.

The Capital Region population is expected to increase from its current 381,743 to 456,377 by 2035. Much of this growth will occur...
in the West Shore, where developments on Bear Mountain, Skirt Mountain, West Hills and Olympic View, in Langford and Colwood, will absorb many of the new single family dwellings. This increase, however, will also see increased pressure on recreational parks and natural areas. Fewer large, forested properties and more small acreages or housing developments also puts more pressure on places like Maltby as wildlife sanctuaries.

In the end, who is a park for? The Capital Regional District has closed access to large parcels of the Sooke Watershed lands; its rationale isn’t simply protection of drinking water for the region, but ecological protection for every species. The Thomson’s purchase raises a key question for Maltby and places like it: In future should priority lie with human recreational use or with the ecosystems that make a property so distinctive?

The Thomsons’ bid to save Maltby isn’t the first grassroots attempt to protect large parcels of the central south island. In 2010 former Highlands Mayor Bob McMinn, then 86, began a campaign to protect Mary Lake, in the Highlands, from development. Using Twitter and an interactive website, supporters could purchase square metres of land, but insufficient money was ultimately raised. In comparison, the Thomsons have been lucky; they emphasize the community support that galvanized their efforts. “We’ve met some amazing people,” says Carmel, “and they’ve all been tremendously generous.” Support that the Thomsons received included letters from 17 conservation organizations. All funds raised went to the Friends of Maltby Lake Society, which may buy the TLC’s remaining six percent.

Several agencies in the Capital Region accept gifts of land, including TLC, The Land Trust Alliance of BC, The Nature Trust of BC, Habitat Acquisition Trust and the Province of BC. Ecologically significant land donations have significant tax benefits and conservation covenants can ensure land is protected in perpetuity. Most, however, do not accept shared interest gifts.

The Thomsons currently use Maltby as an untreated water source. When the lake freezes, small, cobalt blue open patches of water dot the surface. These, Woody explains to me, are where the multitude of natural springs are bubbling up from the lake’s bottom with warmer water. “It’s the only lake in the region that’s classified as Pristine,” he tells me. Carmel pulls out another file to show me proof, “We mortgaged everything we had to save Maltby, and we’re in debt up to our eyeballs.” She pauses, “But when you start to understand the natural, social, environmental and cultural values of this area, you really become passionate.”

“THE BEST OUTCOME would be to have the whole property and lake protected.”

—Carmel Thomson

Maleea Acker is the author of Gardens Aflame: Garry Oak Meadows of BC’s South Coast (New Star, 2012). She is currently completing a PhD in Human Geography, focusing on the intersections between the social sciences and poetry.
The man who fell from the sky
TRUDY DUIVENVOORDEN MITIC

The story of a young soldier from Victoria helps us remember why we should strive for peace.

Broken and gravely injured, he was carried on a board to a nearby farmhouse. A doctor arrived and filled him with morphine. Soon the enemy came knocking and hustled him away, first to a hospital and then to the hardship of POW camps in Holland and Germany. Years later he downplayed that hardship, the makeshift mending of bones, the starvation and 50-pound weight loss. The injury to his hands, he said, was the hardest part, having to ask to be dressed, fed and helped at the toilet.

Norman Wharf learned to live with his injuries and never received any compensation for them. That was typical of the time, recalled his widow, Hilda, when I met with her a few years ago. “His hands were so damaged. He should have had therapy to straighten his fingers.”

Think of Norman Wharf on this Remembrance Day. Think of the hundreds of thousands of soldiers who, over the course of our country’s history, have come home changed and injured and broken or not come home at all. Think of those struggling for understanding and support on the long journey back to some semblance of good health. Remember those—and there are many—for whom that journey is so impossible that stepping off is the only option. That’s what happens when you’re sent to hell and nobody wants to hear about it when you come back.

Think of that hell. From one generation to the next, it’s where power brokers play using other people’s children as their game pieces. Think of the money behind every war, including our own current $14-billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia. Damn the principles, it’s the money that triumphs.

Above all, please think of peace. Norman Wharf, now long gone, would be happy with that, and in the end it’s still the only thought, the only longing, that gives any hope.

Trudy fervently hopes that Canada, under new leadership, will soon begin rediscovering its peacekeeping tradition.
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— Chris Moore, Tour Boat Operator
Butchart Gardens, West Saanich, BC

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