A Magical Time: The Early Days of the Arts at Simon Fraser University
By Carole Gerson

“The most remarkable legacy of the first decade at Simon Fraser University is a creative generation that has become a major influence on the development of Canadian culture. In the past four decades, many of the students who chose to become involved in the arts in the noncredit exhilarating environment of the Centre for Communications and the Arts have continued their creative work, and in many cases have become mentors to a new generation of artists.”

“With little academic infrastructure and much uncertainty about its future at SFU, the non-credit version of the Centre was predominantly an artist-run centre dedicated to creative exploration. Artists drawn to the Centre were interested in pushing the boundaries of the very institution in which they were based, and they were largely free to pursue their interests, and to shape their workshops and special events as they saw fit, mostly outside the constraints of the institution.”

Were you around SFU during its first decade? Did you attend or participate in events in the Theatre? When the university opened in 1965, the Centre for Communication and the Arts was a vibrant hub of artistic innovation, based in the SFU Theatre. Rather than offer credit courses, the Centre’s mandate was to enhance artistic awareness in both the university and the larger community through programs, workshops, and events for students and for the general public. Centrally located opposite the library, the theatre building not only provided a well-designed auditorium that was in constant use, but also proved remarkably adaptable as every corner became a site for artistic activity. Dancers, actors, musicians, composers, poets, film-makers, and painters congregated in a buzz of creative interdisciplinarity that attracted and inspired students and appealed to faculty across the campus, many of whom were recent doctoral graduates, eager to engage with the broadening horizons of the 1960s.

Housed first in the Education Department and then in Communications, the Centre was headed by a series of Directors. Bruce Attridge (1965-66) was followed by Tom Mallinson (1966-68) and Patrick Lyndon (1968-70). Nini Baird – who, according to Hugh Johnston, had long been “the person actually running the operation” – took over in 1970. In 1976, under the leadership of Evan Alderson, the Centre was transformed into a credit program in the newly created Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies.

Among the many long-term professionals who provided guidance and instruction were Iris Garland (dance), Michael Bawtree and John Juliani (theatre), R. Murray Schafer and Phyllis Mailing (music), Stan Fox (film), Iain Baxter and James Felter (visual arts); among the numerous student participants who would become prominent were dancer Karen Rimmer, poet Sharon Thesen, author Brian Fawcett, publisher Karl Siegler, musician Hildegard Westerkamp, theatre director Robin Patterson, film-maker Sandy Wilson, arts administrator Wendy Newman, and actor Norman Browning. Various residencies (including the Purcell String Quartet from 1972 to 1982) and an amazing range of visitors who specialized in traditional and...

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President’s Report
Frances Atkinson

Dear members,

It seems an age since I wrote my last report for the January newsletter. Who would have thought we would find ourselves in such a changed world? I hope you are all keeping as well as possible, physically and mentally.

I will address the most important business items first. Due to the current restrictions, our SFURA 2020 AGM, scheduled for May 21, is cancelled. Alternatives for holding an AGM while normal life is disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic can be found here: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/business/not-for-profit-organizations/societies-agm-covid-19 and http://www.bclaws.ca/civix/document/id/mo/mo/2020_m116.

In brief, we can hold a regular AGM any time before Dec 31, or ask for an extension to March 31 2021, or file a report saying, “No meeting held” for 2020 and have our next AGM in 2021. We can hold a hybrid meeting where some participants would join electronically, or have a meeting that has no physical location component. It is too soon for the board to be able to predict whether or when it will be safe to bring people together in the Fall, or decide which alternative to pursue. I will let you know when we have further information.

The annual CURAC 2020 conference (College and University Retiree Associations of Canada) was due to be held at University of British Columbia on May 14-15. This has been postponed to 2022. It will be held at UBC, co-sponsored by Simon Fraser University and University of Victoria.

The last event your board organized under “business as usual” conditions was an informal lunch at The White Spot on Kingsway in Burnaby on Tuesday January 14. We had a good turnout of some 35 people - on a snowy day if I recall; it does seem such a different era – and enjoyed good food and camaraderie in a friendly and welcoming environment.

A limited version of our annual Ides of March reception went ahead on March 12 just as the province was discussing putting social restrictions in place. At that time SFU had not closed down events or classes. We decided to align with SFU’s practice and let people make their own decisions about whether to attend. As it turned out, 65 people had signed up and 35 attended. The food was great and there were lots of leftovers that people took home or gave to nearby homeless people. To honour the playwright for whom this event is named, we had a visit from “special guest” Samuel Johnson who cast himself as the world’s first database administrator producing one of the world’s most influential dictionaries of the English language, with William Shakespeare as his primary source of data. Our hearty appreciation goes to board member Allen Seager for his dramatic flair.
In my last report I mentioned that a Benefits Review Committee of the Board had reviewed various extended health and travel insurance plans available to retirees and was finalizing comparative guides based on various combinations of needs. These guides are now available on the SFURA website. Web links can be found in the article on page 30 of this newsletter. Please note, the guides are intended to help you navigate the complexities of choosing between various plans. They should not be considered a definitive source of specific provider information. It is most important to thoroughly review all material supplied directly by any provider you may find of interest. Once again I want to express sincere gratitude to committee members Jim Boyd, Jay Burr, Apollonia Cifarelli, and Tom O’Shea for their hard work on this initiative.

Many of you have already renewed your SFURA membership for 2020-2021. If you have yet to renew, you can do so any time via our website at http://www.sfu.ca/retirees/membership-registration.html. Our administrative assistant Annie Ye will record your renewal and will mail out your membership card once SFU loosens restrictions on visiting Burnaby campus. I strongly encourage all of you to renew your membership. Having a healthy engaged membership is more important than ever. In particular we may have to get creative about how to stay connected over the next year or more, and will be looking for a wide range of suggestions about different ways to do so.

Please note that the SFURA office will be closed until further notice. Any urgent matters should be reported to retirees@sfu.ca.

Finally, many thanks are due to Christine Hearn for guest-editing this issue of the newsletter.

Best wishes to all,

Frances

photo: Yellow-fronted Woodpecker / Ron Long
experimental genres of theatre, music, film and dance further enhanced the rich programming of noon shows, evening performances, film series, poetry readings, and serious lectures. Anyone with a spot of free time could spend it happily at the theatre, where they would be sure to find something interesting and engaging.

While the notion of recording all this activity in a single project may seem unrealistically daunting, a core team from the SFURA (Frances Atkinson, Carole Gerson, Tessa Perkins Deneault, Walter Piovesan) is now setting out to capture the flavour of those years in a book and a website. The book, whose target date is 2024 (to coincide with the opening of the Marianne and Edward Gibson Art Museum on Burnaby Mountain, described a year ago in this newsletter), will include memories of participants, analyses by area experts, and selected illustrations. The website will provide a more expansive display of selected images, films, video and audio recordings, and further documentation. We're currently setting up our advisory board and obtaining funding for research and publication expenses. In addition to a commitment from the SFURA, we are grateful for support from President Petter, Joanne Curry (VP External Relations), FASS, FCAT, and University Advancement. These grants will cover production costs and will enable us to hire student researchers to access the considerable resources held in SFU’s university archives and in the library’s Special Collections (once they reopen).

In addition to the materials now housed in these repositories, much might remain in the possession of those who participated in events, or saved programs and posters. This is where you come in: we'd love to hear from readers of this newsletter who have memories to share, documents to show, resources to recommend, or donations of archival materials to offer to the university. Please inform former students, faculty, and colleagues about this project! We can be reached by email at sfura-book@sfu.ca.

On Reflection

On Appreciating People

Marilyn Bowman

After my rather bracing review last issue of the huge amount of physical effort that parents and families needed to exert just to do daily life in my little northern village when I was growing up in the 1940s, our editor encouraged me to consider something less bleak for my next column. That very hard life was before oil flooded into our lives as energy and as components of every aspect of daily life, from clothing and household products, to electricity, heat, and transport. The outbreak of the new virus has providentially provided an entire new map on which we can see what hardships can do to individual lives and to society. This made me think about people, and appreciating them. 

Despite the daily tolls of infection rates and deaths, (which I am compiling on a massive Excel sheet to study patterns), we are increasingly learning wonderful stories about how people are reaching out to help others. This is happening at every level, from condo-owners setting up group shopping lists to reduce outside contact, to a wonderful array of old and new, spontaneously-generating groups intent on helping others. I believe this vast spread of informal and formal civic groups all eager to help is probably more frequent in open societies, of which Canada is a strong example. I remember after a big earthquake in Japan years ago, people patiently waited for their government to tell them what to do next, and massive numbers of lives were lost waiting for orders in that passive system. People did not lack good will, but the culture had not fostered a ‘get up and do it’ style in the way that pioneer cultures such as ours has. 

Our current eager-to-help culture is ranging from group-bread-making and sewing face masks to limit accidental virus spread in daily life, to larger campaigns led by groups, agencies and companies of every size. The wonderful thing about this is that it is done in a non-transactional way. Years ago I heard a talk by a US marriage-researcher in social psychology, who confidently explained how reciprocity was the key element in sustaining good marriages. When reciprocity began to falter, conflict and major trouble followed. I mentally disputed this analysis and over the years have understood the causal sequence, if any, was probably in the reverse direction. When we are with people we love and care about, if conflicts arise and persist, we gradually start to provide less reciprocity. Truly loving attachments do not require quid pro quo, and loving relationships are not transactional. The parent of a sick child or family member of a suffering adult does not offer care in the expectation that a debt is being created that will have to be repaid in the future. The care arises out of love alone, however demanding and difficult it may be at times.

Mark Carney, formerly Chair of the Bank of Canada and former Governor of the Bank of England has recently written in the Economist that this epidemic may change values at a deep level. He sees effective societies as moving away from an obsession with the market-economy in which all value of an activity comes from the market, toward a society in which public qualities are valued, including health as the bottom layer necessary for providing fairness, compassion, and responsibility to others. Education and other public services are surely the next layers that need more public support, as we see from many examples of dying cities south of our border where easily-found labouring jobs in single industries left communities helpless and prey to addiction in the face of change.

In our current lockdown lives, the spontaneous acts of help, money, and goods that are popping up everywhere are a wonderful reminder that when people are free to offer good loving help without being ordered or required, they respond amazingly. I don’t know what the long-term outcome of oil pipelines or new viruses will be, but the future does not look bleak to me. We will help, may bargain, may need to retreat when we take poor directions, but we have a baseline of great goodwill in our country, and we are already in the process of creating new ways to better lives for all.
News media of all varieties have focused attention on the dire consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, keeping citizens current on numbers of cases and numbers of deaths. Attention is drawn also to the heavy burden born by nursing homes and retirement communities, where patients, residents, and staff are among those most vulnerable to the virus. Yet little notice has been taken of what is positive in the response that these institutions, their management and staff, and their occupants have been making.

The first person in the state to be identified as infected with the COVID-19 virus was a thirty-year-old male who ended up at Providence Hospital in Everett after six weeks in Wuhan. Washington State authorities made the first announcement of a death from the disease in the U.S. on February 29 and later announced that two deaths in the same nursing home occurred on February 26 were also due to COVID-19. The “Stay at Home, Be Safe” declaration by Washington State Governor Jay Inslee in response to the COVID-19 epidemic was issued on March 23, 2020.

At Mirabella Seattle, an all-levels-of-care retirement community where I live, Executive Director Travis Duncan began asking residents to practice social distancing earlier in March, shortly after the fifteenth. At Mirabella, all large gatherings within the community were prohibited, which meant switching from service in the common dining rooms to meal delivery service, cancellation of bus trips to shopping and entertainment venues, in-house concerts, lectures, workshops, courses on art and other subjects, fitness classes, pool and fitness activities, salon services, and even closure of the mailroom, the game room, the resident business center, and the beloved Re-Store, a resident-run boutique selling used and unwanted items with proceeds going directly to the Mirabella Seattle Foundation.

Residents who took part in these popular activities and services were suddenly left to their own devices. A short time later it became necessary to discourage even small gatherings of three or more, including shared dinners in apartments and committee and other small group meetings. In a word, each resident was summarily introduced to solitude.

But ways were found to ease the isolation. Email exchanges via Google Group mail exploded, even driving a few subscribers who prefer solitude to opt out of the list! But most jumped in with both feet. Zoom gatherings multiplied, providing some of the missing fitness classes, lectures, and social gatherings.

When the health crisis deepened and demanded stricter social distancing measures, the call went out from the Administration for help making facemasks for nonmedical staff at Mirabella. A dedicated group of residents skilled at stitching rose to the challenge, producing more than 500 washable cloth masks from resident-donated cloth and supplies to fill the immediate need. In courtyard-facing apartments, cheerful, encouraging, and amusing signs made of cut-out paper began appearing, suspended from balcony railings and taped to windows. They were quickly photographed by other residents and the photographs distributed to those living in apartments on the exterior of the building, out of view of the signs. The two Activity Directors for the Health Center prepared and delivered kits of colored paper and patterns to every resident in the building to make “hearts” to display in windows and on balconies.

When large gatherings were banned, the much-used auditorium at Mirabella fell silent, and though some planned lectures could be shifted to online presentations, the usual array of live music concerts could not and was greatly missed. To fill this gap, residents leading the committee bringing live programming to Mirabella have booked two live-streamed concerts for the month of June. Despite our remaining in “Stay at home, stay safe” mode, we have learned to tap the deep resources of dedicated, cooperative, good-humored, and talented people who live and work here to ease the stress of isolation.
Defining Canada’s Middle Class

By Herbert Grubel, Emeritus Professor of Economics, SFU

In November 2019, Canada’s Prime Minister Justin Trudeau appointed MP Mona Fortier to the post of Minister of Middle-class Prosperity. No such ministry has ever existed before.

During her first press conference, the Minister was asked for her definition of the middle class. Her response is summarized in the headline of a report by CTV News: “Middle class prosperity minister says Canada can’t measure who is in the middle class.”

This answer implies the existence of a serious problem for her and the government since it is impossible to adopt policies to serve people whose identity is not known.

It is a puzzle why this problem exists since there are several standard definitions of the middle class used by statisticians and governments around the world. The first considers families to be members of the middle class if they earn incomes falling within a specific range of dollar incomes such as $30 thousand and $50 thousand. Government census and other data readily allow calculation of the number of families in the group and their average incomes.

This approach provides useful information about conditions at a moment in time, but it cannot be used for the design of policies over time. The reason for this problem is discussed by Thomas Sowell, who shows that increases in incomes due to inflation or real gains in income normally experienced by all citizens of Western democracies will necessarily decrease the number and average incomes of families in the range of previously specified absolute incomes. An income of $30 thousand may have been a decent, middle-class income in 1970, but is not in 2020.

A second definition allows the creation of useful information through time by making the range of middle-class income a function of its distribution. For example, it considers families to have middle-class incomes if they are in the middle three quintiles of the distribution or, in other words, have incomes that are neither in the lowest or highest twenty percent and therefore are neither “poor” nor “rich”. Under this definition the number and average incomes of families in the middle class keep up with economy-wide increases in prices and real income and provide information needed to deal with any perceived problems affecting the middle class.

A third definition provides the same benefits as the second but is more in tune with the current concern of politicians and governments with poverty and the incomes of the highest income earners. It has been used by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “which defines a member of the middle class as anyone who earns between 75 per cent and 200 per cent of median household income after tax. Based on the most recent data available from Statistics Canada, in this country that means anywhere from about $45,000 to $120,000.”

It might reasonably be expected that the government of Canada’s statistical office has access to the basic statistics needed to calculate the incomes and numbers of the middle class based on the last two definitions just discussed.

However, Trudeau’s government has failed to do so for unknown reasons. Whatever they may be, they have forced two of its ministers to come up with the following strange statements: Bill Morneau, the Minister of Finance said in the House of Commons on January 30, 2017: “The Government of Canada defines the middle class using a broader set of characteristics than merely income…Middle-class values are values that are common to most Canadians and from all backgrounds: they believe in working hard to get ahead and hope for a better future for their children…they aspire adequate housing and health care, educational opportunities for their children, a secure retirement, job security and modest spending on leisure pursuits.”

Mona Fortier, the Minister of Middle-class Prosperity in her first press conference said:

“Well, I define the middle class where people feel that they can afford their way of life. They have quality of life. And they can ... send their kids to play hockey or even have different activities.

It’s having the cost of living where you can do what you want with your family. So, I think that it’s really important that we look at, how do we make our lives more affordable now?”

These characteristics of the middle class spelled out by the two ministers are common to all Canadians who, without exception, want a better future for their children, aspire to adequate housing and so on. So, why appoint a minister with a big staff, high salary, big office and limousine, and charge her with improving the prosperity of all Canadians, which is the same as the professed goal of all members of the current Liberal and that of all preceding governments of Canada?

Is it possible that the conventional, empirical measures show that the middle class in Canada has done well and that the Liberals’ slogans about the need to help suffering middle-class families used during the last two federal elections are inconsistent with the facts?
Socialist Report

Socializing With COVID-19

Tom O’Shea

Keep your distance, wash your hands, wear a mask. Be anti-social. No large gatherings. Theatres closed. The show isn’t going on. So what can a socialist say about socializing under such conditions?

Luckily for us, restrictions in BC are not as severe as in many other places. Dr. Bonny encourages everyone to get out walking or cycling as long as one maintains proper physical distancing. So Leora and I have made a point of spending an hour each day exploring the neighbourhood on foot or bike. Each day one of us decides on a new route to ensure novelty. We have also met friends to sit on separate park benches and chat in the sun and watch the universe unfolding as it should.

And we have become avid Zoomers, as has much of the world. Zoom (or Skype) provides an easy way to organize on-line gatherings that are almost as good as meeting in-person. We have a regular Zoom weekly meeting with our children; I have a weekly virtual lunch with two old friends; and six members of our book club met last week to discuss Michael Crummey’s wonderful new book “The Innocents.” Which reminds me, many bookstores are open for order and pick-up, so you don’t necessarily have to use Kindle or Kobo for new readings. Although, I must say, I really miss the services of the public library.

Another way to keep connections is through WhatsApp, an application for mobile devices through which you can exchange messages, photos, and videos. In our building, the social committee has set up a WhatsApp group to promote community within the 90 condo units. Members have used it to exchange recipes, borrow flour and a bread maker, and plan a Zoom tea party.

On-line “live” offerings are proliferating as theatre companies try to retain audiences and generate income, either by donation or fees. Included are such luminaries as The Royal Opera House, The Metropolitan Opera, The National Theatre, and The Stratford Festival. Our own Vancouver International Film Festival’s website gives access to the latest films (for a small cost). We recently watched Robert Fisk (who presented at SFU’s Public Square in 2017) in the documentary film “This Is Not a Movie” (and not for the faint-hearted).

I have been inclined to semi-binge watching TV series, in these glorious days of cable television, that I did not set aside time for in pre-COVID-19 days. My tastes run to darker series such as Succession (not a likable character in the lot), The Capture (on the dangers of surveillance), The Night Manager (le Carré’s take on the international arms trade), and to Nordic noir series such as The Killing. Leora and I have enjoyed lighter fare such as Jane the Virgin, Offspring, and The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel. The only downside is that such programs are available only on specialty channels such as Netflix, Crave, and Amazon Prime. CBC Gem is a notable exception.

One unexpected benefit of the current situation is the proliferation of video clips being exchanged among friends. Many relate to US politics and I can always tell when a good one comes in by my wife’s gales of laughter. Check out, for example, “The Liar Tweets Tonight” on royzimmerman.com, but not if you’re a Trump fan.

So now I’m going back to finish reading “End Times—A Brief Guide to the End of the World.” I do this because it reminds me that things are not as bad as they could be.

But the best news of all is that some Vancouver golf courses have just opened. Fore!
Notes during a plague year
Sheila Delany

I found the cover art for my new book at the Tel Aviv Museum, just hours before it was to close indefinitely because of COVID-19, mid-March. A very understanding staff person cut through red tape and sent a hi-res image immediately, waiving payment until they reopen and enabling book production to proceed. Thanks, Yaffa Goldfinger!

At Buy-Low grocery nearby, went to end of long, spaced-out line for checkout. Called up to front by cashier—elderlies exempt from line-up—can’t pass for middle-aged any more!

Feeling ambivalent, uncertain, turn on radio and get Governor Cuomo’s oracular pronouncement: “You’re not Superwoman. You can get this virus!” Always take oracles seriously, and I did—using maximum caution now.

Filipina neighbor Rona offers shopping help. she is a vector: church, cleaning jobs, family of grown kids with jobs. I download and print out statements by pastors about how and why to worship at home, leave them at her door; she stops church attendance for the time being. She gave me a small bowl of her special Filipino dessert (taro, tapioca, fruit in coconut cream) and I was halfway through it before realizing I shouldn’t have taken it. But with all the meat packing plant hotspots, health experts claim that food is not a means of transmission—I hope.

Everyone knows what everyone else is feeling, even if you know nothing else about them; they are as worried as you, as vulnerable. Masked or unmasked, nod or glance of recognition: you too.

The world outside is different. I’ve always felt easy there, safe, joyful; now it’s dangerous and one moves through it evading, avoiding, just in case. But the air is clean now—so little traffic! They say that fish populations are rebounding with so little commercial fishing and sea travel.

A lot comes across the computer screen. One Jewish group offers “Jewish tools” for dealing with the crisis, earning indignant response from other Jews, a heated exchange, apologies and explanations on both sides.

The Mississippi governor says “We will never be China”, refusing closure orders. But they will be China: China without the solution, Wuhan before the measures taken. Racism and anti-communism cloak panic, ignorance, incompetence. The American national myth is not collective but individualistic: plots of land for pioneers, isolated homesteads, Johnny Appleseed, Horatio Alger, robber barons, work hard and make it on your own, etc.

March 30, I hear from the only person so far in my broad acquaintance to have tested positive that I know of: Sujatha in New York, subway conductor and author of a well received memoir of her Dalit, Christian, Communist family.

Capitalism unbound: states bidding against one another for ventilators and other equipment, even FEMA driving up the price. A contracted delivery arrives in Connecticut (my home state)—the truck is empty. Why? “The Feds outbid us” (Connecticut governor).

A wealth of material online. Have heard music I wouldn’t have otherwise, seen some wonderful free films from a Brooklyn company, read a lot of jokes both great and dismaying, watched great little videos (dancers, baby elephants, New York accents, etc.), a Jacobean play, participated in an art seminar in NY. Both of my reading groups now meet on Zoom, one monthly, one weekly. A lot of strain on eyes and butt.

By mid-April, governors in several US regions have banded together in alliances independent of and in opposition to the federal government, to manage the virus rationally. Are we witnessing the start of gradual devolution of the United States? Could it become a new civil war, states vs. feds, with the feds this time the villains, refusing to take the pandemic seriously? Some states want to call their National Guard to protect paid-for supplies of PPE against federal poaching. No actual confrontations yet (end April). But there is likely to be a second wave in a few months.

The US president, erroneously but ominously, claims “total authority”; walks it back a few days later. Obviously he never had 8th-grade Civics, where you learn about checks and balances as well as the colonial revolution against British royal “total authority”.

When will I see my kids and grandson again, one in New York, two in Oakland. Zoom helps. I thought maybe September, for my birthday; my doctor (who phoned today to check up) says probably not until Christmas. It will be a long wait.
Final FIG Report

By Marvin Wideen, Tom O’Shea, Phil Mah

Hello retirees. The three planners of the Financial Interest Group believe, with some reluctance, that it is time for us to leave the activity that we have enjoyed organizing over the past 12 years. For our final report we could like to review how the group began and highlight some of the events over that time.

In May 2008, the SFURA executive circulated a memo to see if a special interest group on financial planning might be of interest to members. Based on the positive replies a meeting of interested retirees followed in which Marvin Wideen, Philip Mah, Tom O’Shea, Shue Tuck Wong, and Iris Woodham met to discuss future plans. We agreed to organize the group and several topics were suggested including proper investments, stock trading, and reducing taxes. It was agreed that we might aim for one session each semester. By the end of 2008 we had set up three seminars: Alan Black on the SFU Sunlife funds; Stan Kanehara on his “couch potato” investment strategy; and Marilyn Cairns on the dreaded tax audit. The committee met again at the end of the year and proposed six seminars a year, an ambitious target that soon was cut back to one seminar per semester, and this was generally maintained over the years.

During its time the FIG planned approximately thirty seminars involving a range of presenters including retirees, SFU staff, and financial representatives from commercial firms. The scope has been very broad, and the seminars evolved over time in terms of complexity and participation. In the early days, we emphasized presentations by members of SFURA describing their personal experiences; in more recent years, we relied on commercial presenters to offer expertise on a variety of investment strategies and projections for the future. Personal presentations included Konrad Colbow on options trading, George Suart on day trading, Fred Einstein on his buy and hold strategy, Ted Cohn on the financial crisis, James Dean on the Eurozone crisis, Jim Cavers on his computer program to manage RRIF withdrawals, David Andolfatto on quantitative easing, Jay Burr and Barbara McDaniel on taxation of US citizens in Canada, and a variety of panels in which members (including Marv Wideen, Larry Albright, Philip Mah, Tom Poiker, Jay Burr, Tom O’Shea, Bill Gruver, and Jim Boyd) gave brief descriptions of their investment experiences.

Commercial presentations included real estate as investment, risks to consider in investing, mutual funds versus ETFs, RRIFs versus annuities, investment fees, estate planning, sustainable investing, filing US income tax, and on-line trading. Our final seminar, and one of our most successful, was led by Jay Burr and Jim Boyd and centred on travel insurance, attracting almost 50 participants.

We would like to close by thanking all of you who attended seminars, read our reports in the newsletter, and made presentations over the years. We have enjoyed this journey. Time to move on.
COVID-19

By Hilary Jones

This social distancing
Is really quite a pain
Will life as once we knew it
Be quite the same again?

With all my classes cancelled
I don’t know where I am
My only really scheduled day
Is with the garbage man

My cataracts will stay in place
My teeth will not be cleaned
I keep my fingers off my face
I’ve books on line to read

I’ve washed my hands a thousand times
My skin is dry and raw
I found a jar of diaper cream
To stop them being sore

My husband’s getting chatty
With all this time to spare
Just him and me alone to talk
He even cut my hair

The stores are almost empty
I search the shelves in vain
My meagre toilet roll supply
Is going down the drain

If I run out of chocolate
A crisis I will name
I cannot hug my grandkids
Just phoning’s not the same

The emails they are piling up
Some funny, some insane
But none of these will help us
Make the virus quickly wane

I’ve rid the garden of all weeds
Cleaned every window pane
I fill my time with extra deeds
Write poems to keep me sane

COVID-19 - Part 2

The longer that I stay at home
Advantages are rife
Perhaps this wretched virus
Will give us a better life

No tasks or obligations
My time is all my own
I’m up to date with family
I just pick up the phone

I please myself on what to wear
I know I won’t be seen
Can don my oldest ragged clothes
Or dress up like a queen

I do my hair in different ways
Spray on my best perfume
There’s no one who’s allergic
To say “Please leave the room”

I write a note to far-off friends
It’s good to keep in touch
I keep a journal every day
Though I don’t do that much

The air is so much cleaner now
Light traffic everywhere
The locals only in the parks
With neighbours we all share

And when this all is over
And activities resume
Some things will simply carry on
I’ll still be using ZOOM

The traffic may stay lighter
People may just stay home
Keep up to date with neighbours
And choose not far to roam

And though I hate to say it
It’s not that I’m a prude
But I don’t think I’ll be hugging
So please don’t think me rude.
Calming Memories in a Time of the Jitters

By Marcia Toms

Fortunate enough to have a big garden in Vancouver, I am not really stuck indoors in this Time of COVID-19, but I do find myself getting jittery. Like the smell of bread baking or the sight of layers of green glowing as the sun rises, the right memories can calm.

One of the those memories, and the stories from it I love to tell myself, begins in early May of 1989, when, with two colleagues from the Professional Development Program at SFU’s Faculty of Education, I sailed from Vancouver to Alert Bay. Judith McPhee was the experienced boater and Kau‘i Keliipio and I her greenhorn deckhands. Our mission was to visit SFU’s new Indigenous, site-based teacher education cohort, celebrate its first graduates and relax on the Salish Sea as we journeyed.

Alert Bay is a small, mostly indigenous community in the Kwakwak’wakw nation on Cormorant Island just off the east coast of Vancouver Island and close to Port McNeill. The Band School where the student teachers were completing their final practicum occupied part of the old residential school. Big and crumbling, it must once have been an imposing edifice and would have loomed large, albeit bearing no resemblance in structure, material or meaning to the traditional cedar plank big houses of the people forced to attend it. But, temporarily at least, the Namgis band had chosen to put it to a worthy purpose.

And so, we three set out, hoping for mostly fine weather with well-behaved wind and few rainstorms to worry us. Leaving Lund was the real start of the adventure and we were happy also to leave behind the few boaters active so early in the sailing season. We headed directly into Desolation Sound a place that belies its name by boasting warm waters and anchorages so welcoming that few boaters bother to venture farther up the coast. It may have seemed desolate to Captain Vancouver when he named it, a fjord land with conifers reaching impossibly high and mountains rising directly from the water, but for us it marked a thrilling start.

We sailed past Cortez Island, keeping to the most easterly of three possible routes. Each would have its own challenges, and this one, the least travelled, would take us through four sets of rapids.

We all woke very early. This day was to be rapids day: Yaculta, Dent, Green Point, and Whirlpool. Judith explained that timing was everything, that we had to sail through each set at slack tide which would change slightly as we moved north and west and that should we wish, we novices could each have a go with the wheel so we could feel the pull of the current even when at its weakest. We kept our eyes open wide as we slid, aided by the boat’s motor, up the channel and into the first rapids. The day, calm and warm for early May saw a new sun glinting on dark water. Judith consulted her charts and her watch. On we went. I took the wheel briefly and so did Kau‘i. The current’s power pulled at the boat, but our timing was perfect and soon, it seemed, we were through all four of the obstacles. Only later would I read about Yaculta’s fame and the toll it had taken on vessels less cautious.
Our moorage that evening was in a small cove, behind a tiny, lightly treed island within a stone’s throw of an old village. Matilpi is one of those places that the few things written about it call “abandoned.” And although no longer inhabited, it was never abandoned, at least not willingly. The place is astonishingly beautiful with a white pebble beach stretching along the shore and fronting the village, now overlaid with and hidden by forest. The trees grow straight and tall, the vegetation lush and spilling everywhere, signaling a clear testament to the rich and bountiful life its people had once lived. We saw all this from afar, the boat’s deck. We decided not to go ashore. There was no one to invite us in, and we had not sought permission.

I provided our evening meal at Matilpi. Stepping into Judith’s dry suit, but unfortunately without enough weight to make me a glider, I plunged into the shallow water and bobbed along, an aquatic dough girl, finally fetching up three perfect crabs. We ate and then prepared for bed. There was not a sound outside save the water slapping gently against the boat. We all fell asleep easily. Sometime during the black of night, the boat shook violently, the stays rattled and loose metal clanged against the mast. We made our way quickly to the deck. Nothing. The sea was flat and unmoving, not a wave, not a sound. What awoke us, I will never know: an orca, a small earthquake? Nothing left a signature and we returned to sleep pondering a mystery.

The next afternoon we motored into Alert Bay and were greeted by Judy, our Faculty Associate colleague. For the next three days we attended the students’ graduation ceremony, complete with dancing, singing and a small feast, visited classes at the Band School and heard the kids practicing their Kwak’wala lessons, and spent time with new teachers at the U’Mista Cultural Centre, opened in 1980. Not a museum, but a living testament to the resilience and vitality of Kwakwaka’waka culture, the centre was built to display artifacts and symbols of culture both historic and current. While there, we were privileged to meet Gloria Cranmer Webster (OC), a granddaughter of the ethnographer George Hunt and a daughter of the esteemed chief Dan Cranmer. She was the first Indigenous person to attend UBC where she earned a BA in Anthropology in 1956. She had spent endless hours working to reclaim potlatch goods confiscated when the RCMP raided her father’s famous 1921 Village Island Potlatch. All the gifts, regalia and ritual items were taken, and many people jailed at Oakalla Prison Farm, far from home. Their crimes? Singing, dancing and giving gifts. Cranmer Webster also worked to bring many other precious items back to Alert Bay, some of them from London, New York and Chicago.

My Alert Bay adventure was about to end. I knew I would return, and I did. Now, three decades later, a particular memory endures: deep, dark water, greens of myriad hues and a stillness to slow the breath. These have the power, when recalled, to calm and revitalize. And so does knowing that the people who have lived in that place for more than ten millennia, the most verdantly beautiful place I have ever been, endure and thrive still, despite a time of great suffering they could never have anticipated and did not choose.
Remembering Mary-Ann Stouck (1941-2020)

Dr. Mary-Ann Stouck, a long-time member of the English Department, died on April 4th. Highly regarded by her colleagues and students, she will be remembered for her outstanding commitment to university teaching and for her personal qualities of intelligence, honesty, kindness and “self-deprecating wit.”

Mary-Ann and her husband David were a part of the 1966 generation of SFU teachers and scholars. A graduate of McMaster University and the University of Toronto, she epitomized the primary concern of Canadian universities for exceptional undergraduate and graduate teaching. She was a Professor of Middle English at SFU over 37 years and, as a colleague remarks, “she loved teaching Chaucer.” A former student, who followed her into the profession of English, remembers “A learned and warm-spirited guide who took students seriously, and prepared them to engage with medieval tales on their own — in, of course, the deeply, expertly informed historical, conceptual context she provided…. And she gave students the very special gift of learning how to hear Chaucer in his own voice, firsthand. From her instruction, they learned habits of scholarship, the delights that follow the discipline.”

She was a knowledgeable and effective committee member in the English Department and a highly successful administrator. Late in the 1980’s, the Co-coordinator of the Humanities Minor Program invited her to teach an occasional course on the ‘Saints.’ But when Paul Dutton became Chair of History, “she agreed to step in as Co-coordinator (from 1993-1995) and spear-headed the drive to create a major program in Humanities and set up our joint major and minor programs with other departments. It was thus Mary-Ann who put us on a course to departmental status, which happened under Steven Duguid.” She also played a key role in the Canadian Society of Medievalists in the 1990’s.

After her retirement Mary-Ann served the West Vancouver SPCA with great dedication and, reflecting her love of animals, wrote two children’s books: Jeannie Houdini, A Hamster’s Tale and A Fine Winter’s Cap. Also in the 1990’s she was appointed as a board member to the Leon and Thea Koerner Foundation, published Medieval Saints: A Reader (1999), and the extremely popular A Short Reader of Medieval Saints (2009) which is not just an abbreviated version of her earlier book but “a quick transfusion of Saints for the busy student and reader.”

Most striking was Mary-Ann’s great courage during the final two years of her life, after she had been officially diagnosed as suffering from mesothelioma. She continued to meet friends and to say her good-byes without a trace of self-pity. When breathing became more difficult for her and ventilators were in demand at hospitals and care homes, she turned to MAiD for assistance. She died at home with her family around her, with dignity and grace.

Sandra Djwa (with Tirthankar Bose, Paul Dutton, Janet Giltrow, and Kathy Mezei)
It is March 2020. We are in the middle of the COVID-19 lockdown and I have concluded that I am officially suffering from cabin fever. As a photographer, getting out with my camera has typically been the way I deal with those claustrophobic feelings but now, trying to observe the “stay at home” directives that we hear multiple times every day, that option is considerably reduced.

Bird feeders to the rescue.

I started thinking about ways to photograph the birds coming to my feeders. The main problem being - if I wanted natural looking photos I had to avoid showing the feeders.

The solution was to put up appropriate perches, small for the Anna’s Hummingbirds and larger for the rest, keeping in mind what background would appear behind any bird on that perch.

After that it just required patience. It took awhile for most of the birds to start using the perches but they eventually did. The exception was the Stellers Jay. He was around but always kept in the bushes. When I set up a perch just outside his favourite haunt he took to it almost immediately. Within 10 minutes I had the perfect photo of a Stellers Jay.

Many of these pictures were taken while I was literally sitting at my kitchen table. I normally would not choose to shoot through glass but it was far too cold to have the sliding patio door open for the hours I spent there. When I started I wasn’t really expecting anything very great from the photography - it was just fun. So I started shooting through the glass and quickly discovered that, as long as I avoided reflections, the glass did not reduce the quality of the photos one little bit.

So for many days I was happily occupied and entertained by the feathered activity outside the window - the perfect antidote for cabin fever.

But then a new challenge arose. How was I going to get a natural looking photo of the Pileated Woodpecker that was regularly coming to my suet cage?

Luckily, I have a wood-burning fireplace.

Stored in my shed I had a few short lengths of five-inch diameter tree trunk. The perfect solution. I drilled a couple of holes in one of the pieces of firewood, stuffed the holes with suet and hung the log in place of the suet cage. The log was turned such that the camera could not see the holes but the bird would be perfectly posed for the photo. Once the log was in place the woodpecker showed up in no time and appeared to like this arrangement much better than the old suet cage. He came several times every day and gave me all the photo opportunities I could hope for. It wasn’t long before all the woodpeckers in the area discovered the suet log and I soon had Flickers, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers visiting regularly as well as a Red-breasted Nuthatch.

I was getting great pictures but more than that I was thoroughly enjoying just being there with the birds. In pretty short order I had perfectly good pictures of all of them but I still sit there. I spend hours at the kitchen table telling myself I am waiting for even better shots.

I believe I can keep up this self-delusion for as long as the travel ban lasts. ✿
Is a habit picked up in libraries poring over nineteenth-century manuscripts of poems written on the blank sides of used envelopes, carefully unsealed and spread out to make a clean surface to begin anew.

Why do this now when paper is plentiful and cheap? Less intimidating than a fresh white sheet—or worse, a blue-lined yellow legal pad? Friendlier, perhaps, if addressed to me by someone I know.

But these days, no one writes a letter on paper, lovingly folds it, pressing hard to fit in the envelope, addresses it, adds a stamp, and posts it with care and optimism. No, it’s business envelopes, those bearing bills or rejection letters, that fill the need.

Most have windows, see-through rectangles that save the sender the minute it takes to recopy the address—a claimed space that must be skirted by the pen.

It is—the window—a metaphor of the poem itself, a slightly clouded means of looking into the soul to find the words, to find the way forward.

NOTE: You may listen to Jared reading his poem at this url:
http://www.sfu.ca/retirees/SFURA_Downloads.html
Reflections On The Likely Positive Impact Of The Corona Virus

My fellow citizens: It does not help to be scared, to get panicked, to lose sleep, to get awfully stressed over something you cannot change and over which you have no control. So do not let all these negative news and dire predictions spoil your life and poison your existence. Sit back, take a deep breath, try to relax, think positive and give some thought to what you are about to read. Hopefully this brief outline of some positive long term effects that COVID-19 is likely to have can uplift your spirits and help you get through this unprecedented stressful phase of your life.

Preface

Being a member of the most vulnerable age group (90-100 years old) I have no idea whether I will survive to see the end of the COVID-19 or whether I will succumb to this new virus. Whatever happens I consider myself fortunate to have witnessed how this virus has, in a relatively short time, affected the world in totally unprecedented ways. It was surely very informative and highly instructive to observe the extent to which it has changed the super-technological life that we are enjoying in the 21st century. Naturally, one can read detailed historical accounts of epidemics and pandemics that took place in the past but nothing equals this rather unique personal experience that I, as a social scientist, am witnessing first hand right now.

Who would have ever thought that one day one will look at the usually over-crowded streets of Milan, Madrid or Paris and see them utterly deserted? Who would have imagined that a day will come when super-lively hubs like Times Square in New York or Piccadilly Circus in London would be woefully empty of tourists, residents or passers-by? No science fiction movie, no horror film, no futuristic TV program would have been able to capture or to match the real scenes we are watching everyday on our television screen!

The assessments of the current impact the virus is having on people's health, on medicare systems, on the economy, or will have on the future of society and speculation about how long it will last, when it will end, what scars it will leave behind, are rampant. And despite valiant attempts to foresee or predict, due to the novelty of the virus, and the diverse reactions to it in different parts of the world, no one really knows for sure or can accurately tell.

In this age of intensive social communications, whether one resorts to the print media, the visual media, the social media or to other sources of news, the result is always the same.

In this age of intensive social communications, whether one resorts to the print media, the visual media, the social media or to other sources of news, the result is always the same. There is hardly any single uplifting news item! Bad news, negative news, depressing news greet you everywhere you look, everywhere you go. So is there anything positive that can be said about the situation created by this new virus? Is it at all possible that the virus could end up having some positive consequences in certain areas and certain aspects of our lives?

As a veteran social scientist and university educator, I repeatedly argued in my classes and my publications that nothing is entirely positive or entirely negative, that nothing is totally good or totally bad. All phenomena have a good side and a bad side. Which side one looks at, which side one sees depends largely on the person's background and outlook. Optimistic people usually try to deemphasize the negative and to focus on the positive. Pessimistic people, on the other hand, tend to highlight, amplify and concentrate on the negative while ignoring or minimizing the positive. While focussing on the negative can be detrimental to the individual's psychological well-being, highlighting and stressing the positive can be, and usually is, uplifting and stress-reducing.

This is precisely the purpose of this essay, to draw attention to some actually or potentially beneficial effects of the COVID-19 virus that are either ignored, overlooked or deliberately downplayed. The list of positives is by no means exhaustive and the positives are listed in no particular order. Any ranking would inevitably be arbitrary and idiosyncratic.

A. POSITIVE EFFECTS IN THE SPIRITUAL REALM

Let me start this essay with some positive effects the Corona virus is likely to have in the spiritual field. According to Collins English Dictionary, Spiritual means relating to people's thoughts and beliefs, rather than to their bodies and...
1) Greater Appreciation of How Good and Enjoyable Life Is

It is truly surprising how rarely we stop to reflect upon and to realize how good our lives are. How often do we sit back and contemplate how lucky we are to be able to enjoy the comfortable and enviable existence we have been blessed with. How often do we lie down and think about the immense pleasure we derive from sports, entertainments of all kinds, recreational activities that we watch or take part in? Just think of how little we appreciate the freedom of mobility and action that make life worth living. To what extent does our relentless pursuit of material goods and worldly possessions distract us from the spiritual and emotional wellbeing that we are able to achieve and to enjoy?

Yes, this seems to be the nature of human beings. They do not appreciate the gift of health until they get sick. They do not appreciate liberty until they are in confinement. They do not appreciate the fresh air they breathe or the pure water they drink until some pollution renders the air unhealthy or the water undrinkable. And it is true, unfortunately, that those who are born with a silver spoon are unable to understand the misery of those born in poverty. Those who have a roof on their heads do not know how it is to be homeless. Those whose lucky star dictated that they be born in Switzerland, Norway, USA or Canada have little understanding and compassion for those who were born in some unlucky part of the world.

The restrictions, the limitations, the deprivations that were imposed as a result of the Corona virus, as hard as they are to swallow, are bound to lead to a much greater appreciation of what we have come to take for granted.

2) Injecting a Sense of Humility in an Arrogant World

Human beings have every reason to be extremely proud of what they have achieved in most domains of everyday life. The technological achievements have been not only spectacular but outright overwhelming. No age has witnessed more technological advances, more inventions, more breath-taking problem-solving mechanisms than the present age. While this progress has been beneficial on so many fronts, while it has reduced many of life’s hardships and introduced many pleasure and enjoyment fields to our daily existence, it has induced feelings of arrogance, superiority and invincibility. It led us to believe that we are the true masters of the universe who can control any threat, counter any danger, manage any risk. The same technological advances and achievements that made us so proud led us to lose sight of our vulnerabilities. We became oblivious, insensitive to and rather incognizant of our weaknesses. We surely needed a wakeup call, a reminder of our limitations. Then came COVID-19.

All of a sudden we found ourselves faced with a dangerous threat from a new, and previously unheard of, virus. The virus, though invisible to the naked eye, quickly challenged our arrogance and injected a sense of humility in the otherwise super-confident and overly secure world we created.

B. POSITIVE EFFECTS IN THE NATURAL AND PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTS

3) COVID-19 As a Pollution Alleviator

Prior to the advent of the corona virus as a health issue, climate change, global warming, air
Pollution were considered the major threats to the survival of humanity. Air pollution in several industrial cities reached highly dangerous levels. Whatever modest attempts were made to reduce it were not successful. Following the drastic measures taken in severely polluted countries like China and Italy, to deal with the threat posed by the new virus, the air quality and the pollution situation have drastically improved as may be seen from recent satellite images and graphics.

The American Thoracic Society has repeatedly maintained that reductions in air pollution yielded fast and dramatic impacts on health-outcomes, as well as decreases in all-cause morbidity. This claim is supported by findings in "Health Benefits of Air Pollution Reduction," a new research published in the American Thoracic Society's journal, Annals of the American Thoracic Society.

Here is also what Kate Yoder wrote on Mar 19, 2020 in the Grist

"The coronavirus pandemic is changing everything — including the quality of the air we breathe. In three coronavirus hotspots, satellite imagery revealed a dramatic decline in air pollution in recent weeks as China, Italy, and Iran were brought to a standstill. One Stanford scientist estimated that China's coronavirus lockdown could have saved 77,000 lives by curbing emissions from factories and vehicles — nearly 10 times the number of deaths worldwide from the virus so far."

Will this improvement be a long lasting one? Whether in the long run a substantial or a sizeable segment of the population change their habits and abandon the car in favour of other less polluting means of transportation remains to be seen. For the time being and for as long as the restrictions last, air quality is substantially better in various countries than it was prior to COVID-19.

4) COVID-19 As an Agent of Accident and Crime Prevention

There is another related benefit to the dramatic reduction in pollution. COVID-19 has eliminated or drastically reduced motor vehicle traffic in many parts of the world and in many congested cities. As a result, thousands of traffic accidents that were bound to happen did not take place. Thousands of lives were saved and hundreds of thousands of injuries were prevented.

The virus is having a positive impact on certain crimes as well. Those whose task is to compile statistics on street crime (whether assault or robbery) and those who are interested in those statistics should brace themselves for a sharp decline that will appear in this type of crime during the pandemic period. Residential burglaries are set to show sharp declines as well, as a result of people staying home. Motor vehicle theft and bicycle theft are bound to show downward trends for the same reason as will shoplifting due to the closure of Department stores and other types of stores.

It remains to be seen whether COVID-19 will also lead to a reduction in suicide rates as happens in wartime. In his study of suicide during war Pat O'Malley (1975) cites research indicating that suicide rates decline during wartime. The most likely explanation for this decline, in his view, is the greater social cohesion of societies during wartime, but changes in the economy, such as reduced rates of unemployment, may also play a role. Lester & Yang (1992) refer to Durkheim's study of suicide (1897) showing declining suicide rates during wars and attributing the decline to the increase in social integration brought about by war. Explaining Durkheim's thesis, they suggest that during times of war, the existence of clear external enemy and the bonding together in the face of this threat increase the social ties and networking in the society, thereby increasing social integration.

Since COVID-19 is a different type of enemy and as the main advice to prevent its spread and to protect against catching it is to practise social distance, even social isolation, the impact on suicide rates may be quite different. So it will be of interest to sociologists, psychologists and psychiatrists to measure and analyze suicide rates during the pandemic period to figure out what the true impact was and to find out the factors that might have led the rates to change either
C. POSITIVE EFFECTS IN THE POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL SPHERES

5) COVID-19 As a Unifying Force and Enhancer of Community Solidarity

History shows that nothing unifies divided societies and societies in conflict more than the threat of a common enemy. Faced with an incoming danger people forget their differences, their past animosities and create a common front able to face and confront the perceived threat. Leaders of different factions, different political parties get together to jointly devise plans and strategies for action. People adhering to different or opposing ideologies swallow their pride and join their opponents to find out the best ways and the most effective strategies to confront and overcome the imminent danger. Some of these temporary alliances may even continue and persist once the danger has passed and the enemy has been conquered. A phrase that is being heard over and over again from many different quarters is “We are all in this together”. This is not only a call for unity, it is the ultimate cry for social solidarity.

The USA provides a good example of partisanship and political polarization that has brought political action in congress to an almost standstill. As a result of the common danger of the virus Democrats and Republicans have recently shown a willingness to co-operate that was absent during the years of the Trump administration. The new wave of cooperation yielded results rather quickly and on March 25th it was announced that the U.S. Senate and the White House have reached a deal on a $2 trillion aid package to help American workers survive the pandemic. The Congress approved the package with an unbelievable vote of 96/0 on March 25th and the president signed it two days later. Under the plan, individuals who earn $75,000 or less in adjusted gross income would get direct payments of $1,200 each, with married couples earning up to $150,000 receiving $2,400.

6) COVID-19 Brought Greater Appreciation for Front Line Heroes and Other Out of Sight and Undervalued Groups

Front line health care workers have been quietly performing their hard and dangerous work without fanfare or complaint. Just the few patients appreciated their dedication and their commitment and families who had first hand experience with the service and care they provided. As dedicated as health workers are they neither sought publicity nor demanded recognition. They simply went on with their duties unnoticed and unmentioned. Thanks to COVID-19 things have changed to the better. People suddenly realized the difficult and perilous job frontline health workers do and decided to express their appreciation and gratitude in different ways. One of those ways is to have sirens blown at 7.00 PM every night followed by people cheering, clapping and applauding from their windows and their balconies. It is quite a moving display of gratitude and support. In some places, like Vancouver, gun and ship horns are blown at 9.00 PM also as a tribute to health care workers.

There is another group whose valuable and underestimated contribution has been highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. A group that is sometimes met with hostility and xenophobic derision. Everyone who has been watching the news lately (and we all have been) must have noticed the large number of health experts with foreign sounding names. Their recent visibility, brought about by the pandemic, drew people’s attention to the fact that the Canadian health care system relies heavily on immigrants or offspring of immigrants to staff various positions in every sector of the system. Canadians became cognizant of the significant and valuable role the foreign-born play in medical and health occupations. What the effects of the pandemic would have been had it not been for the remarkable contribution of those professionals is a matter of speculation. With all predictions pointing to the virus coming back in waves the softening of the familiar anti immigrant feelings coupled with the friendly attitudes, now exhibited towards a group that is usually viewed with suspicion and mistrust, should be regarded as a very positive outcome.

7) COVID-19 As a Social bond Enhancer

Businesses advising or enticing employees to work at home, cancellation of sports and entertainment events, the closure of casinos, bars, pubs, night clubs, taverns, movie theatres and other popular places where people spend a good part of the evening to alleviate the stress of a hard working day, mean that those hours will be spent at home with the family

One of those ways is to have sirens blown at 7.00 PM every night followed by people cheering, clapping and applauding from their windows and their balconies. It is quite a moving display of gratitude and support.
or may be with close friends thus strengthening, enhancing and reinforcing familial and social bonds. Parents with young children will have a greater opportunity spend more time together and this can only be beneficial for their relationship.

On the other hand, with couples spending more time together in the close confines of their residence, domestic violence is bound to show some increase. But since those who commit the violence are a minority, the overall effect of this increase in hours of togetherness should be positive overall.

Spending more time and the evenings at home may yet have another positive result. In countries with declining populations like Japan or Hungary, prolonged and enhanced intimacy may give a boost to the birth rate.

8) Enhancing and Promoting Distance Education and Online Learning

Opinions may differ as to the quality and integrity of online and distance education vis a vis campus education, but no one would challenge the fact that distance education is more economical and more accessible than campus education. Closing universities, colleges, schools, etc. to avoid or minimize personal contact has forced many of those who were reliant on campus education to acquire credits or to finish their degrees to turn to online classes, seminars, tutorials, etc. How will the experiment turn out? Will it manage to change the preference of many students?

It is even expected that certain conservative disciplines (such as law) that may have been reluctant to use new technologies and novel means of transmitting knowledge will become more receptive to the use of distance learning. Writing in Forbes magazine on March 24, 2020, Mark Cohen is convinced that the Corona virus will “turbocharge legal industry transformation” and will propel law into the digital age thus reshaping its landscape. He believes that the entire legal system will be affected-consumers, providers, the Academy, and the judicial system. He cites examples of educational companies that already provide accessible, affordable, flexible, quality content to millions of online learners and by so doing demonstrating that education is a lifelong process not a place. Cohen predicts that law firms and In-house departments will be transformed and that the courts will go digital.

All this remains to be seen. Be this as it may, having an addition or an alternative to expensive campus education and improving access to higher education can only be beneficial in the long run.

In its bulletin “What is on this week?” (March 23-29, 2020) Simon Fraser University announced that:

**SUMMER SEMESTER OFFERED BY REMOTE METHODS**

Simon Fraser University will continue operations throughout the summer term, while respecting the advice and instructions from governments and health authorities concerning health and safety.

All instruction will be offered through remote methods during our upcoming summer semester – there will be no face-to-face instruction and no requirements for students to attend exams in person.

Instructors can continue to access support from the Centre for Educational Excellence for assistance in remote teaching methods. Graduate students who are completing their degrees will be able to participate in remote thesis examinations.

**D. THE POSITIVE ROLE OF COVID-19 AS PROBLEM INDICATOR AND REFORM INSTIGATOR**

9) COVID-19 As a Problem Indicator

Committees can be formed, panels can be struck to study, examine analyze and evaluate the operations of a given system to find out how it is working, and whether it is achieving its enunciated goals . But nothing is better than actual experience in testing what is really going on and in revealing what needs fixing, what needs replacement, what needs change, what needs improvement and so on.

The sudden and quick spread of the COVID-19 is to be credited with revealing serious deficiencies, limitations and shortcomings in the health care systems of many countries including some of the richest countries on earth, such as the USA and China. The virus acted as an eye opener. The shortages it exposed , the lacunae it brought to light, the inadequacies it highlighted can continue and persist or can be effectively dealt with, thus avoiding many of the nefarious effects of future epidemics and pandemics. The problems the virus threw in the hands of lethargic politicians are serious enough to warrant serious attention followed by drastic action. They will undoubtedly persist until solutions are found and implemented and politicians will be judged on what they did or did not do to solve the problems the virus has revealed.

But let us not forget that the virus did not simply highlight problems and shortcomings. It indicated as well certain positive functions and achievements that may have been overlooked. The closure of public schools in an attempt to
slow the spread of the virus drew attention to useful functions schools do perform and valuable services they provide, especially to disadvantaged kids, in addition to the primary function of education. Suddenly people realized that many of these school kids rely heavily on meals provided by the schools for their nutrition. And once schools closed their doors people realized what a valuable job of caring for the children teachers do.

10) COVID-19 Has Shown How Interconnected and Interdependent the World is and has Highlighted the Chronic Problem of Global Inequality

More than any other occurrence or happening COVID-19 has amply demonstrated how interconnected and interdependent the world has become. The fact that a virus can emerge in one country and spread with amazing speed to over 150 other countries is the ultimate proof that the days of isolationism are over. It provides a warning about what may lay ahead and a clear strategy for action. COVID-19 has alerted us to the fact that a pandemic that may start in the future in a poor developing country could spread to the whole world in a matter of days! Such a horrific scenario has serious implications for international economic aid. It emphasizes the sheer inadequacy of current efforts aimed at helping developing countries achieve economic justice. It also demonstrates their urgent and pressing need for far more technical help and assistance than they are getting right now.

Yes, thanks to COVID-19 we now realize that improving social, economic and health conditions in poor developing countries is no longer a matter of largesse but of survival. The virus has shown that economic aid can make the difference between life and death. It is undeniable that humanitarian considerations have miserably failed in assuring a decent standard of living, in alleviating the poverty, reducing the mortality rate or even improving the health condition of those countries populations. Now that COVID-19 has shown that the economic survival of rich countries may depend on how such a pandemic is dealt with if it reoccurs in one of the poor developing countries, it is to be hoped that more generous aid will be geared to those countries that for years have been screaming desperately for help. An encouraging start seems to be taking place with the recent decision of the IMF to forgive the debt (or part of it) owed by some poor countries. But this is far from enough. So it remains to be seen whether in the future rich countries that have been stunted by COVID-19 will be more generous to the needy ones.

11) COVID-19 Highlights Existing Flagrant Inequalities and Reaffirms the Ever Pressing Need for Egalitarianism

COVID-19 does not respect borders or follow rules. Contrary to some other health ailments, COVID-19 does not seem to be a discriminating or a selective health threat. It strikes people of all ages, of both genders, etc. It does not differentiate between higher class, middle class or other classes in society. Yet one positive aspect of the virus is that it highlights the vulnerability of certain groups such as the elderly, health practitioners, elderly-care workers, the homeless, prison inmates, institutional residents, etc. Current experience with the virus points out to the urgent need members of these groups have for adequate care and resources when infected.

In addition to age disparities, early US data on death attributed to COVID-19, point to racial disparities in those who die, with black people more vulnerable to succumb to the virus than whites. While definitive research may provide plausible explanations for this apparent disparity, several factors may be at play and could explain it. One explanation points to the long standing racial disparities in health care in the US. Structural factors like racism, housing discrimination, poverty and unequal and discriminatory treatment in the medical system may also play a role. It has also been suggested that black Americans suffer from a number of health co-morbidities that may place them at a higher risk for COVID-19 death. Another explanation points to “occupational hazards” with black Americans being employed in industries and occupations that enhance the risk of infection and later death. For example, black workers are more than twice as likely to be respiratory therapists (an occupation shown to be at a particularly high risk) as white workers.

The racial disparities and the flagrant inequalities in wealth in many countries have been a deep source of economic injustice and a major cause of riots, turmoil, even revolutions. Achieving economic justice is becoming one of the primary
political goals in electoral campaigns. The loud cries for narrowing the gap between rich and poor are getting louder with each passing day. Judging by what is being debated in the Parliaments of many countries as a result of the Corona virus, some financial help for the poor, the financially destitute may be on the way. Those in the USA who are disillusioned with the fact that most tax breaks seem to be going to the wealthy may find some comfort in the recent free fall of the stock markets. In addition, they will have to credit the virus for any cash that may be directed towards the poor, a desirable goal that may ultimately be realized. An encouraging recent headline in Quartz (March 16, 2020) reads: “Coronavirus sparks support for Universal Basic Income in unlikely places”.

12) COVID-19 Promotes Respect for Science and will Generate More Funds for Science Research

Despite what academics like me do to promote the cause of science and to pinpoint the vital importance of scientific research, a good number of people, including politicians of different stripes, continue to ignore, underestimate, even minimize the invaluable role research plays in finding evidence-based solutions to a wide range of problems that plague today’s society. It is a sad fact that when budgets are tight, particularly in difficult economic times, there is a tendency to cut funds that were made available for scientific research rather than adding to them. Suddenly today, the general public, world wide, is faced with a situation that clearly demonstrates the vital, even the crucial, need for science and for science research to manage an imminent existential threat to the human race. The believable predictions that the corona virus will come back in waves may be alarming. But the frequently heard calls “Listen to the scientists” are rather reassuring. They advise that only science could provide the means to prevent, protect and treat. So it is to be hoped that this will convince those who still need convincing that action is preferable to reaction, that a better strategy is to be prepared rather than to wait until the threat is upon us and is staring us in the face.

13) COVID-19 Will Stimulate Innovations and will Spark intensive Research in fields like Bio-technology and Microbiology

Innovation is the key to progress! Just think of what life would be without all the inventions that took place in the last couple of centuries. Scientists in any field are driven not only by their instinctive curiosity but also by their intense desire to contribute to knowledge and to make the world a better place to live in. Additional motivations and ambitions also provide strong incentives to search, find and excel. Occasionally a certain event or a certain condition may trigger an urgent need to find solutions to a previously unknown or rarely encountered problem. What can be more pressing than to find innovative ways to deal with a new deadly virus that has already claimed over a hundred thousand lives world-wide and has brought the globe to a quasi standstill? It is not surprising, therefore, that COVID-19 has mobilized science researchers from every part of the world to discover not only a vaccine but also protection methods, treatment drugs and better and faster ways of testing for the virus. The fight against the virus and the race against time are proceeding unabated on so many fronts. Here is just what one scientist at the University of Manitoba mentioned to the CBC on March 29. The scientist is Jason Kindrachuk, an associate professor and Canada research chair in emerging viruses. “The pandemic is bringing people from different fields together — and that’s a good thing. "What we have is a crisis that’s driving the merger of different disciplines to come up with really quick solutions to very complex problems,” he said.

14) COVID-19 Is Bound to Enhance Preparedness for the Next Outbreak of the Corona Virus as well as Other Novel Ones

There can be no denial that despite recent previous virus outbreaks like Ebola and Sars, COVID-19 has attacked while
the world was off guard and totally unprepared. One of the countries least prepared seems to be the USA. Writing in The Atlantic on March 25, 2020, Uri Friedman explains “Why America Is Uniquely Unsuited to Dealing With the Corona virus”. Friedman admits that the USA have many obvious strengths in this fight—it is a wealthy nation, a hub for technological and scientific innovation, a democratic society with free-flowing information, and a leader in handling global-health crises. He goes on to point out that the outbreak has also exposed weaknesses that put the country at a disadvantage from the start, particularly relative to other rich democracies that are confronting the same disease but have managed, if only partially so far, to flatten their curve. In the United States, the virus has struck a highly polarized, fragmented, and individualistic society, one not haunted and transformed by a previous epidemic the way other societies have been. Friedman claims that these factors, along with the Trump administration’s failures to take the threat of the virus seriously when it first emerged, placed the United States squarely on the back foot in its battle against COVID-19.

Another distinguished American who is undoubtedly distraught at the manifest lack of US preparedness for the virus is Bill Gates. Five years ago, Bill Gates, with remarkable foresight, offered to those who would listen a detailed recipe telling them how to get prepared for what he firmly believed was coming. He warned them against what he was convinced is a far more realistic threat than that of a nuclear war. Sadly, his dire warnings fell on deaf ears. Had leaders listened to Bill Gates’ presentation to the TED conference of 2015 in Vancouver and followed his advice, had they taken action according to his insightful suggestions, they would have spared the world a great deal of misery, hardship and loss.

It is too late now to cry over spilt milk, but if humans are to learn from past mistakes, this ill-preparedness is unlikely to be the case next time around. COVID-19 will be credited with affirming the need for enhanced preparedness and getting the world ready for the challenge posed by a new pandemic.

15) COVID-19 Is Bound to Lead to Improving Working Conditions in Hospitals, Factories, Offices, Work Establishments, etc.

The deficiencies, the shortcomings, the limitations that the new virus has revealed, brought to light or highlighted, do call for some decisive action on the part of politicians, particularly those who have been using all kinds of excuses, legitimate or otherwise, to shut their eyes and close their hearts. The virus has amply demonstrated the pressing urgent need not only to revamp the health care system but to overhaul several other systems as well. Hopefully the cries for change, for improvements will be heeded.

In Canada the division of jurisdiction between the federal, provincial and municipal governments has often been used as a pretext for inaction, for not addressing a host of problems when they arise. The same cannot be said of the voluntary sector. Luckily, the voluntary sector in Canada is among the best and most dedicated in the world. Increasing voluntarism has been in evidence since this devastating health crisis began. But the voluntary sector is neither equipped financially nor resource-wise to solve the problems or improve the conditions that the advent of the new virus has underlined.

16) COVID-19 Is Bound to Lead to the Improvement of Living Conditions in Homes for the Elderly

Shortly after the discovery of the new virus it became clear that the elderly, particularly those with compromised immune systems, are the ones most vulnerable and most susceptible to succumb to its lethal threat. In some places elderly nursing homes became the epicentres of COVID-19. Most of the early deaths in my home province, British Columbia,
that were attributed to, or blamed on, COVID-19 occurred in an elderly nursing home in North Vancouver. More recently, shocking revelations came to light about the abominable conditions in long term care facilities for the elderly in Quebec and Ontario. Dozens of the viral deaths in those elderly care homes were attributed to those dismal and disgraceful conditions. Needless to say, complaints about the conditions and care in nursing homes are not new. But what the new virus did was to prove, if any proof was needed, that drastic action was urgently required to improve the quality of care and the quality of life in those places where the elderly are, for the most part, involuntarily confined. The cries of those who were unable to be with, or to hold, their old beloved ones in their final hours were simply heart-breaking. If the anguish and the tears we watched on our TV screens do not result in some drastic action to improve those conditions, nothing will.

17) COVID-19 Is Bound to Lead to Improving Travelling Conditions in Aeroplanes, Cruises, Trains, Subways, etc.

Complaints about the tight space in aeroplanes, the unhealthy conditions in some cruise ships, the overcrowding in trains, subways, buses, and other means of public transportation, have been going on and on for years and years. And yet, rather than improving, economic considerations continue to render the situation worse and worse with every passing year. COVID-19 has simply highlighted problems that have existed for decades. Urgent and drastic action is obviously needed. But it is extremely difficult to predict what is going to happen. Some airlines and cruise ship companies are facing a crisis of colossal proportions that is not of their own making and some are on the brink of bankruptcy. Will they survive? Will they be able bring about any of the desired changes? Will they be able to face the challenges that were not revealed but simply magnified by the new virus? Only time will tell.

18) COVID-19 Is Bound to Lead to Reforms in the Social Security System and Unemployment Insurance Schemes

The COVID-19 virus has unmasked serious deficiencies in several social security shields. It revealed many holes in the social safety net. Once workers and employees, permanent, seasonal or temporary started being laid off, discharged or let go and once their need for social security and government assistance was apparent, it became clear that the current remedies against poverty, which are simply passable at the best of times, are totally inadequate in times of emergencies like those caused by a pandemic. The flagrant inadequacies of public and private remedies for alleviating the hardships caused by sudden unemployment required immediate solutions to prevent working class and middle class families from falling into an economic abyss. There was a rush to find and implement band-aid solutions to rescue families from the pending doom. There is little doubt that once this crisis is over the social security system, as well as unemployment insurance schemes, will be reviewed, scrutinized and hopefully restructured and reformed.

19) COVID-19 As a Promoter of Hygienic Habits

The novelty of the COVID-19 virus and the lack of any known treatment or vaccine greatly narrowed the options available to deal with this new threat. Time and time again it was repeatedly mentioned, even stressed, that the only protection lies in simple hygienic practices such as frequently washing hands, abstaining from touching one's face, and sanitizing, as often as possible, surfaces that may have been contaminated with the virus. Advice as to what to do when sneezing or coughing in the presence of others add to the list of instructions people are given. Maintaining social distance when
in line-ups, in crowded places or in offices or workshops, etc. is also being promoted as primary means of protection and prevention.

It goes without saying that these hygienic habits should be followed whether there is a viral threat or not. It has been shown, however, over and over again, that promoting them as good manners or healthy habits is not enough. They seem to need a more powerful incentive to be adopted and practised on a daily basis. COVID-19 has now provided the most powerful of all incentives, namely the risk of catching a deadly virus, and hopefully many of these hygienic habits will persist long after the threat of the virus has become just a memory.

E. THE POSITIVE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SPHERE

20) COVID-19 As an Instigator of Penal and Prison Reform

Let me end this brief essay about the potentially positive effects of the COVID-19 virus with a reference to some effects that are related directly to my professional discipline, criminology.

I have always been a harsh critic and a fierce opponent of the cruel punishment of imprisonment calling for its abolition and offering restorative justice as a replacement, as a more civilized justice paradigm. In the process I have often quoted one of the greatest philosophers of the 20th century, G. B. Shaw. He maintained that “Modern imprisonment, that is imprisonment practised as a punishment as well as a means of detention, is extremely cruel and mischievous, and therefore extremely wicked” (1946:17). Shaw argued that “...imprisonment is at once the most cruel of punishments and the one those who inflict it without having ever experienced it cannot believe to be cruel.” (1946:23).

What Shaw was saying was very similar to what Charles Dickens wrote after visiting the Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, widely regarded as a model prison, which at the time was the most expensive public building ever constructed in the U.S.A. (Gopnik, 2012), where every prisoner was kept in silent, separate confinement: “I believe that very few men are capable of estimating the immense amount of torture and agony which this dreadful punishment, prolonged for years, inflicts upon the sufferers...”.

Stronger than any humanitarian cry for penal and correctional reform, COVID-19 has drawn attention to the urgent need to do something to alleviate the chronic problems of overcrowding and inhumane conditions in prisons and jails. Somehow people seem to forget that once society opts for incarceration as punishment it becomes incumbent upon it to ensure the health and safety of those whom it locks up.

On March 18, 2020, the Los Angeles Times published an editorial entitled “Coronavirus makes jails and prisons potential death traps. That puts us all in danger”. The editorial went on to say:

“Despite the worldwide consensus on the best measures people can take to protect themselves from the coronavirus, there are more than 2 million people in the United States who cannot practice social distancing, are prohibited from using or even possessing hand sanitizer and who cannot wash their hands without permission.

As inmates in local jails and state and federal prisons, they are virtually defenseless against the virus. In jails especially — where quarters are cramped, inmate turnover is high, and thousands of people are admitted each day — it is only a matter of time before an infected person who does not yet show symptoms enters one of these locked institutions. And once the virus enters such a confined space, it will spread.

Certainly this is a crisis for the inmate population, which is made up largely of people from socially and economically marginalized communities and suffers disproportionately from medical and mental health problems.

And of course it is a crisis for their families, whom they will be rejoining. But it is a crisis as well for the rest of us for two distinct reasons: First, they are part of our community, and we as a society are responsible for their safety during the period in which we have locked them up with no ability to practice the protective measures that the rest of us do — the distancing, the hand washing. And second, for those observers who might shrug over the fate of prisoners, it is important to remember that inmates are released every day to rejoin the rest of us.”

On April 27 The New York Times reported that Prisons across the world have become powerful breeding grounds for the coronavirus, prompting governments to release hundreds of thousands of inmates in a mad scramble to curb the spread of the contagion behind bars. The pandemic, according to the Times, has also set off prisoner rebellions as angry inmates have called new attention to chronic problems in corrections systems in many countries, including overcrowding, filth and limited access to health care.

Here in British Columbia it was reported (Vancouver Sun, April 17, 2020, p. A4) that a prisoner from Mission Institution in the Fraser Valley region has died from complications related to COVID-19. The same paper quoted a report from CSC (Correctional Service Canada) indicating that as of April 15, 2020, Mission Institution had the worst record of prisons in Canada with 54 inmates testing positive for the Coronavirus!
Policing practices are also changing as a result of the risks posed by the Corona virus. On March 19, The Independent newspaper, in Philadelphia, carried the headline: Coronavirus: Philadelphia police ‘delay’ arrests for nonviolent crime as prisoners are released early across at least five states. The paper reported that:

“Police in some US cities are taking a softer approach to nonviolent crime as a result of the coronavirus outbreak.

In Philadelphia police said this week that they would be “delaying” arrests for offences such as theft and prostitution. The measures are aimed at minimizing contact between officers and suspects in order to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Under the plans, officers will be given discretion to decide whether to classify a crime as nonviolent, and will seek advice from supervisors about whether suspects pose a threat to the public.

“The department is not turning a blind eye to crime,” Philadelphia police commissioner Danielle Outlaw said. “No one will escape accountability for the crimes that they commit.”

The new approach outlined above is one of a series of measures by law enforcement agencies that together represent a significant shift in policing as a result of the outbreak. It comes as authorities in a number of states have started to release inmates to lessen the risk of an outbreak in jails.

The warnings about the dire confinement conditions in penal institutions, the need to make less use of incarceration, the pressing need to release non-violent offenders, are coming from all sides and all quarters.

In USA Today (March, 19, 2020) Kristine Phillips talks about 'Complete chaos': How the coronavirus pandemic is upending the criminal justice system.

The Independent (March, 19, 2020) reports that US doctors are demanding the immediate release of prisoners and detainees to avert disaster.

The calls for reform are by no means limited to the USA. Law changes were enacted in Italy following the riots that took place in 27 institutions early in March and resulted in the death of 13 inmates. The riots were sparked by inmates’ worries over coronavirus and the suspension of family visits. Agence France Presse reported on March 18 that a new government decree that came into effect on that day dictated that certain categories of inmates serving sentences of less than 18 months would be allowed to serve them under house arrest, to be monitored with electronic bracelets.

These encouraging developments in penology and in policing create the hope that the Corona virus may succeed in bringing about reforms that criminologists and other humanitarians have failed to achieve in more than a century!

To end this essay let me just draw attention to the role that COVID-19 is playing as an emotional sensitizer. Fervent proponents of incarceration as a punishment have never personally experienced the pains of imprisonment. Could it be hoped that the cruise passengers who were confined to their staterooms, or that travellers who were forced into quarantine, as well as those who wisely practised solitary isolation, will become more sensitive to the devastating effects and shattering pains of imprisonment? Could this personal experience sensitize them to the extreme cruelty of deprivation of liberty as a punitive sanction? Could it render them less ferocious in their demands for more and longer custodial sentences? I certainly hope so. And if this really happens will the corona virus be the one to thank for this much needed humanitarian development?

References:
We welcome eight new members to Club 85: Anadi Das, Jack Knetch, Jean Koepke, Barbara McDaniel, Malcolm Page, Leigh Palmer, Margaret Rimmington, and Dave Ryeburn. These are members who are 85 or will reach 85 during the 2020/2021 membership year. They receive life memberships in the SFURA. I am told the best part is not having to remember to renew membership each year.

The Board began this category in 2018 for three members who had reached the age of 90. Last year, in 2019, the age threshold was reduced to 85 so we got a bumper crop of those 85-90. We have had two deaths and our life members now number 43. Impressive, eh?

If I have missed adding you, please let me know; <evelyn@sfu.ca>

Sheila Delany’s new book, For and Against the Bible, is out this summer from Brill. The volume translates Pour et Contre la Bible(1801), a commentary on Jewish and Christian scriptures by the Parisian atheist and revolutionary writer Sylvain Maréchal (1750 – 1803).

Books by SFURA authors are shown on our website at: http://www.sfu.ca/retirees/Books_By_Retirees.html

And congratulations to Selma Wassermann, our most prolific author, who has had six books published, a seventh “in press” and an eighth which she is writing now. She sent us an article which was published in the Phi Beta Kappan in the June 2002 issue. It is a great article about leaving her SFU teaching position, one which will resonate with many of you.

Selma writes:

Facing retirement was not easy for me, since teaching was my raison d’ etre since graduation from university. Some of my retiring colleagues welcomed the chance to have a life with more degrees of freedom, looking forward to more time for golf, travel, bridge games. Some, like myself, had mixed feelings, having come to SFU when the university was just a bunch of unfinished buildings on the top of Burnaby Mountain, all of us deeply invested in its future.

How could I reconcile leaving teaching when I felt enough energy to take on another hundred years of classes? What would my days be like without the excitement and challenges that are such concomitants of a teaching life? Knowing that it was time to step down, move on, make way for “new blood,” didn’t make it easy. Would I have stayed, if it had been possible?

The article is available at http://www.sfu.ca/retirees/SFURA_Downloads.html

A subcommittee of the Board consisting of Jay Burr, Jim Boyd, Tom O’Shea and Apollonia Cifarelli reviewed the extended health plans and travel insurance available to SFU retirees. Their comparisons resulted in the following Summary and Guide, which have now been approved by the Board and published on our website: http://www.sfu.ca/retirees/questions-and-resources/faq.html. These documents are intended to provide information that can help retirees select the most appropriate plans for their particular retirement situation, but don’t replace the need to study the details of each plan.

Summary: Extended Health Coverage (EHC) and Travel Insurance
This provides a brief overview. For more information refer to the following Guide:
Choosing Extended Health And Travel Insurance. A Guide to help SFU retirees determine the best combination of extended health care and emergency travel insurance to meet their specific needs. ✹
We ask any of you who have further information about any deceased SFU retirees to submit obituaries to the SFURA Webmaster on the link provided on our website at: https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/in-memoriam/a_g.html. We post names of all deceased SFU retirees whom we are aware of, not only those who were SFURA members. We welcome tributes to your former colleagues. We will place them with their obituaries on the website.

Ida Curtis passed away on January 21, 2020 in Seattle Washington. She and her husband Jared lived at Mirabella Retirement Community where they moved to after retiring from SFU. She was Secretary for the Alumni Association from 1973-1980 and departmental assistant and student advisor for Geography from 1980-1996. She was awarded the CD Nelson Memorial Prize in 1977 for her work as a resource person for handicapped students. After retiring she was the author of two books, which we have noted in the SFURA Newsletter and a third to be published in July 2020. She won an award from Pacific Northwest Writers’ Association in 2014. Her obituary is at; https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/retirees/memoriam/2020/Ida_curtis.pdf

Don DeVoretz passed away on March 14, 2020 with Julia at his side. One of his favourite SFURA activities was the Indian Arm boat trip in August 2018. He was a Professor in the SFU Department of Economics and specialized in natural resources and in citizenship and immigration. His pastimes included music, art, photography and outdoor activities. His obituary is at: https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/retirees/memoriam/2020/Don_DEVORETZ_obit.pdf

Bill Krane passed away on February 4, 2020. He served SFU as chair of the Psychology Department, Associate Dean of Arts and Social Sciences and Associate Vice-President Academic. He finished his career at The University of Northern British Columbia as Vice-President Academic. At SFU he was highly involved with the development of the Surrey Campus, the Great Northern Way property and the partner ship with Fraser International College. His obituary is at: http://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/retirees/memoriam/2020/WilliamKrane.pdf

Mike Plischke was a member of the Physics Department and was its Chair from 1988-1993 and again from 1998-2003. He served as Dean of Science from 2003-2009. He was named a Fellow of the American Physical Society. His death on April 29, 2020 saddened colleagues across the university. In the words of his colleagues - he was an insightful man of science, an amazing theorist, a great teacher, a wonderful colleague, a dedicated administrator and a close friend. He will be missed. His obituary will appear on our website when it becomes available and will be found at: https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/in-memoriam/n_s.html

Leslie Reimer died in Sydney BC on April 6, 2020. Leslie was a liaison librarian at SFU for many years, and also worked in Collections Management before she retired several years ago. Before coming to SFU, Leslie had been the librarian at the Bamfield Marine Station and spoke very fondly of that time in her life. Leslie was a warm and gentle soul and a wonderful colleague to many of us. We will miss her. Her obituary will appear on our website when it becomes available and will be found at: https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/in-memoriam/n_s.html

Mary-Ann Stouck passed away at her home in West Vancouver on April 4, 2020 with her husband David and her son Don at her side. She and David came to SFU in 1966 to teach English and Humanities where she specialized in Chaucer and Medieval Saints. She enjoyed travel and nature and had a special love for animals. Her obituary is at: https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/retirees/memoriam/2020/StouckMA_obit.pdf
Editorial: Random Recollections of SFU

It has been a pleasure guest editing this issue of Simon Says and it has brought back a host of memories.

SFU first entered my consciousness in February of 1965, thanks to a full-page article in the Vancouver Sun by Ron Baker, then developing the academic side of the university. I was enchanted; then and there I decided that was where I was going.

It wouldn’t be easy for a young girl from the Kootenays—there was pressure to go to Notre Dame University or the new Selkirk College, both close to home and much, much cheaper, but I was determined to escape to the Coast. In my small town graduating class of more than 60, only four boys and I went on to university.

Labour Day weekend 1966 brought my first look. My parents drove me up the hill, we rounded the last curve, and there it was: the magical, shining, white palace on the mountain, looking every bit as perfect as Arthur Erickson and Geoff Massey had envisioned.

People who have only seen it since the Maggie Benston addition have no idea how stunning and dramatic it was then. We stopped at the Transportation Centre and the student on duty was Sandy Wilson, later to be a well-known filmmaker.

There was nothing quite like SFU in the sixties. We seemed to be (or thought we were) at the forefront of everything from learning to activism. Faculty ranged from distinguished scholars attracted by a new university to young thought leaders, many from the United States, who opened up new worlds.

Academically it was superb. Nothing was ordinary, nothing was routine, and the tutorial system forced us to organize what we had learned and allowed us to express it in a critical setting. I took every course I could from Robin Blaser.

Theatre, from Michael Bawtree to John Juliani with his Savage God productions, was a constant source of wonder. There was always something on, including Centralia and The Devils. Lunchtime concerts were free.

But academics and the theatre didn’t distract us from our political objectives. There were sit-ins, there were occupations (I came across my “Defend the 114” pin the other day), there were times making signs all night in the Rotunda for use on the Mall the next day.

There was also tremendous learning, both inside and outside the classroom. When I went to Ottawa as a political reporter I realized all the politics I had inhaled at SFU had been the best possible training for my job. If I hadn’t seen it all already I had seen a variation of it.

English Department politics were fraught. I served on a number of committees and was also on the Graduate Student Executive. As the only woman on the GSE my main job was to mediate between the egos of two male graduate student leaders so we could actually get something done.

Then there was a position on the Alumni Association during its second year while we were busy figuring out what our role was. A key objective was to pressure the new NDP government to re-write the Universities Act to make it more representative.

We managed to get student, faculty, staff, and alumni representation under the new Act and I was selected, along with Bert Hawrysh, as SFU’s first alumni representatives. Jack Diamond was Chair of the Board and he must have marveled at the contrast: Bert a straight-as-a-die MBA grad, and me, a vaguely hippyish cub reporter at the Vancouver Sun. Bert and I worked well together until I had to resign my position when I moved to Ottawa.

After Ottawa I again served on the Alumni Board; was Director of the Writing and Publishing Program; made videos about the openings of Harbour Centre, the Centre for Dialogue, and the Segal Centre, videos about other SFU initiatives; and developed and edited aq.

One of the best times was when Warren Gill asked me to go through the archives to find anything I could about the history of the university (in addition to what I had lived). It took months of fascinating diggng and the results were an expanded aq for the 40th anniversary and a video called 40 Years in 40 Minutes, a montage of photos from the early years to 2005.

Unfortunately they ran out of money before we were able to add names to faces on the video. It would be great if that could be done before everyone who knows who is who is gone.

Again, thanks for the editing opportunity.

- Christine Hearn