A Criminologist’s Point Of View

DIFFERENTIAL EMPATHY: UNDERSTANDING THE STARK CONTRAST IN EMOTIONAL REACTION TO VICTIMIZING ACTIONS:
A CURRENT YET NEGLECTED TOPIC IN VICTIMOLOGY / EZZAT A. FATTAH

Foreword:

On October 18, 2023, Josh Paul, The director of congressional and public affairs at the US Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, tendered his resignation. The text of his two-page resignation letter is posted on LinkedIn. The letter is much too long to reproduce here. A few lines from what he said in it and from several interviews he gave in the media, following his resignation, would abundantly show why his reasoning, namely his criticism of USA leaders for their overwhelming empathy vis-à-vis the victims of the Oct. 7th, 2023 massacre in contrast to their total oblivion to the suffering of innocent civilian Palestinians (women and children) killed by the thousands in Gaza, touched my heart as a victimologist. I found it rather surprising that this intriguing phenomenon does not seem to have been the subject of empirical research in our young discipline, and it inspired me to write this brief essay.

Here is a very condensed excerpt of what Paul said in his interviews with Joy Reid and with Ayman Mohyeldine on MSNBC:

"When Russia bombs hospitals, we condemn it as a war crime. When Russia takes out the power grid of a country, we condemn it as a war crime. But, when Israel does it, we provide the bombs......We never seem to ask, well, what about the Palestinian right not to face incursions in their villages, not to be bombed from the air,” he then added. ”So I think looking at this on equal terms, we have to talk about both sides."

INTRODUCTION:

Empathy: The Definition

The Meriam Webster Dictionary defines Empathy as follows: “the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another.”

Are Empathy and Sympathy the same?

According to the same dictionary:

“Sympathy and empathy both refer to a caring response to the emotional state of another person, but a distinction between them is typically made: while sympathy is a feeling of sincere concern for someone who is experiencing something difficult or painful, empathy involves actively sharing in the emotional experience of the other person.”

Differential Empathy: An important though neglected phenomenon in Victimology

Both empathy and sympathy are human emotional responses. They are quite relevant to the discipline of Victimology because they describe our feelings about, and our reaction to, acts of victimization perpetrated against fellow humans or against other living beings. Despite the large number of books and the dozens of articles that deal with the notion of empathy I hardly came across, in my extensive readings of the abundant victimological literature, research or studies attempting to explain how the same victimizing acts can generate totally different, even contradictory, feelings of empathy in the observers.

A Modest Attempt to Understand Differential And Selective Empathy

Empathy has always been considered a noble emotion. People who do not feel or exhibit empathy are believed to be cold, affectless, insensitive and lackadaisical.

To avoid any misunderstanding let me state at the outset that what is of interest here is not why certain individuals do not feel empathy or why they lack the capacity of empathizing with others. It is not why some people are heartless, apathetic,
Dear members,

1. Effective Feb 1, SFU will no longer send to any non-SFU addresses in email lists. We have three retiree email lists. Here are the changes we’ll make before Feb 1. sfu-retirees-info@sfu.ca is used for sending announcements to all 1300 retirees. This list automatically includes the @sfu.ca email addresses of all SFU retirees. Only the SFURA board can send to this list. This list is not affected by the change.

   SFURA-Activities@SFU.CA is used for sending notices to some 400 retirees, including 100 nonSFU email addresses. This list existed before the above automated list was created as a superset. It will be retired. The non-SFU addresses will be moved to a google group. The SFURA board will send announcements to both the sfu-retirees-info@sfu.ca list and the new google group to ensure that all SFU and non-SFU addressees receive them.

   RETIrees-FORum@SFU.CA is used for chat. The nonSFU addresses in this list are being moved to a new list called sfu-retirees-forum@googlegroups.com. We are looking into how to link the two groups so that people can send to them as one.

NOTE: There are several unknowns with all of the above. Things may change. If so, we will let you know by email.

2. All forwarding from @sfu.ca mailboxes will be removed on Feb 1. If you have your email forwarded to another email service such as gmail, yahoo, etc., it will be disabled as of February 1. You will have to access your SFU and external accounts separately. Many email apps make this easy by letting you set up multiple mail accounts.

NOTE: SFU will also be taking down the alumni.sfu.ca email forwarding service as of February 1.

Why is SFU is making these email changes?
They are to do with new email protocols in the world to combat fraudulent email. If you are interested in the technical details, the relevant protocol is called DMARC (see dmarc.org).

3. Some retirees have recently lost access to Office 365 IT Services delayed a settings update for a year or two, so some of our retirees were able to use Office 365 for up to two years after they retired. This situation changed in December so a number of retirees suddenly lost their access to Office 365. This has never been a retiree benefit, so we cannot get it back. However, we have found an inexpensive alternative:

   Go to https://www.microsoft.com/en-ca/workplace-discount-program
   Type in your @sfu.ca email address

   You will receive an email back with a link to purchase a 1-year licence for either $55.30 per year (personal) or $76.30 per year (family) (plus taxes on top of those prices). The family option seems to be sharable by up to 5 other people, not necessarily at the same address. A board member has successfully purchased a personal licence at this price. We have not tested family sharing between multiple people.

On a lighter note.
We look forward to seeing you at the upcoming SFURA lunch at Steamworks on on Tuesday February 13, Steamworks Brewpub, 375 Water Street Vancouver.
See the ad on page 3 for more info.

Best Regards

Frances
Frances Atkinson
SFURA President
Dear Editor: In reading the latest issue of Simon Says I am once again impressed by the quality of this publication. One of the best things about my thirty-six years at SFU were the constant educational opportunities that were presented by my daily interactions with highly intelligent and interesting people. Now, those same people are continuing to educate and entertain me via the pages of Simon Says and I thank all of you for that.

But - we would not be enjoying all those excellent articles were it not for the tremendous work of Marcia Toms and Walter Piovesan. While reading each edition I continually marvel at the hours of work that it has taken to produce - and Marcia and Walter do it voluntarily. And just organising the layout is not all they do. As a problematic contributor I have first hand experience with the dedication that these two exhibit when dealing with their authors. They always patiently work through the issues until everyone is satisfied.

Simon Says has not had a letters to the editor column but I’m hoping this might be a beginning. We need a means to comment on and show appreciation for all the effort that goes into producing this magazine that we all enjoy.

Ron Long
empathy, even though the degrees or levels of empathy felt by disasters. Those disasters generally evoke universal feelings of studied, empirically researched and explained. It does not seem to be the case and this is precisely why it needs to be uniformly felt, to surface and be exhibited regardless of if empathy is a natural or instinctive reaction to the process by which certain victims are objectified while other similar or identical victims are humanized, even glorified. It is quite natural and easy to understand that when young, old, vulnerable, handicapped, helpless fellow humans are victimized they generate or evoke more empathy (and more sympathy) in the witnesses or onlookers than other victims.

But how to explain the stark contrast, even the contradiction, in human emotional reaction to the same victimizing actions perpetrated against seemingly identical or similar victims? What explains the shocking double standard that sometimes greets horrendous acts of victimization? Animosity by itself or the process of taking sides alone does not provide a comprehensive or satisfactory explanation for this intriguing phenomenon. If so, what other elements interject and influence how a person feels about the victim(s)?

To reiterate, what the notion of differential or selective empathy refers to and tries to understand and explain is the mental process by which certain victims are objectified while other similar or identical victims are humanized, even glorified.

Another related question is “Why is it that persons who may feel a great deal of empathy to the pain and suffering of an animal or a living creature can remain totally indifferent and apathetic to gross cruelty and atrocity inflicted upon fellow human beings?”

I will never forget the murder case I researched while studying in Vienna in the early 1960’s. A young robber pitilessly killed a lonely widow and yet, before leaving her residence, ensured that there was enough food left for her dog just in case nobody showed up at the house for several days.

If empathy is a natural or instinctive reaction to the victimization and suffering of others, one would expect it to be uniformly felt, to surface and to be exhibited regardless of who the victim or the object of the suffering is. But this does not seem to be the case and this is precisely why it needs to be studied, empirically researched and explained.

Differential empathy is not usually observed in natural disasters. Those disasters generally evoke universal feelings of empathy even though the degrees or levels of empathy felt by observers may substantially vary. Selective empathy is usually observed in the cases of victimizations perpetrated by humans against fellow humans.

There is no more typical situation for differential empathy than the case of war between religious or political enemies/factions where feelings, emotions, and views are diametrically opposed and fundamentally polarized.

It goes without saying that there are numerous factors that determine how others feel when witnessing or being informed of some gruesome victimization that took place.

Factors that may help understand and eventually explain the phenomenon of differential or selective empathy

A host of factors stand out as necessary to understand and to explain the differential reaction to, and feelings about, the victimization and exploitation of others.

What follows is simply an enumeration of some of the factors that may shed light and help understand, but not explain the phenomenon of differential empathy.

1) The Characteristics and Background of the External Observer

Sociodemographic variables: age, gender, social class, occupation, and so on certainly play an important role, not only in evoking or denying empathy, but also in the level of empathy they generate in external observers.

Gender: the general impression, for example, is that females are more susceptible to feeling and experiencing empathy because they are tender, sensitive, compassionate and more emotional than men are. Searching the web shows several recent studies empirically validating this popular belief (Tristan Bove, Fortune Magazine; 2022).

Occupation: Certain occupations are also likely to have a strong impact on empathy because they do, especially when practised for long periods, have a desensitizing effect on those who practise them. The same can be said of certain working environments such as working in a slaughterhouse, in a morgue, or in a penal institution.

To reiterate something made clear earlier in this essay, however, the focus here is not on why some people feel empathy while others don’t or why some are more empathetic than others. The central question addressed here is why observers who feel deep empathy for certain victims can be totally indifferent to the same suffering experienced by similar or identical victims?

2) The location, context, nature, type and seriousness of the victimization

These are obvious factors that can lead to varying degrees of empathy, sympathy and commiseration. The same victimizing behavior/act can take place in various contexts and in very different circumstances. Just as an example, the context of a victimizing act committed in self defence can explain the absence or lack of empathy for the victim in both the victimizer as well as in others.

3) The Characteristics of the victim

Victims’ age, race, and gender, are important factors that usually help in understanding and explaining the problematic phenomenon of differential/selective empathy. For example, it
is both natural and understandable that children as well as old, handicapped and helpless victims would evoke more empathy than young healthy adults. It is also easy to understand that in a racially divided country like the USA victimization of whites, particularly at the hands of blacks, will generate much greater empathy for the victims than vice-versa.

4) The Characteristics of the victimizer
The characteristics of the victimizer also seem to play a significant role in evoking or denying empathy for the victim among external observers.

5) Victim/Victimizer relationships
Is empathy more often felt when victimizations occur within the family or when they are perpetrated by strangers? No research seems to be available to help answer the question. Intuitively, one would expect empathy to be greater in the latter scenario, namely when the victims and their victimizers are total strangers, than in cases of intra-family victimization.

6) Identification with the victim or victimizer
It seems rather axiomatic that identification with the victim leads to empathy while identification with the aggressor prevents or blocks empathy from being felt.

7) Love or hate for the aggressor and the victim
Human beings have a tendency to group people in classes, categories, factions, and sects according to age, race, ethnicity, skin color, social class, origin, provenance, religion, occupation, and so on. Attitudes and feelings towards these groups are usually not neutral. They are marked by love, hate or indifference.

For example, if people for some reason hate law enforcement officers, any victimization at the hands of one of them will evoke more empathy and more compassion towards the victim than when the victimization is perpetrated by a member of a group the observer is more favorable to.

8) Victim’s behavior and role, if any, in precipitating or triggering the victimization.
Blaming the victim whether rightly or wrongly is undoubtedly a very important factor in determining how external observers will judge the victimizing behavior and will have a significant influence on how they feel about the victim’s suffering. The popular adjective “innocent” victim suggests that empathy reaches higher levels in such cases than when the victim has contributed in some way to his/her own victimization.

9) Biases and prejudices of the observer
It goes without saying that the biases and prejudices of the observer play an important role in shaping the person’s attitude and feelings about the victimization in question.

10) Vilification, denigration and dehumanization of the victim(s)
This process can act to prevent the feeling of empathy and can also act post facto to alleviate the guilt being felt over the lack of empathy. When people are criticized or questioned about their lack of empathy for certain victims they often resort to the vilification, denigration and even dehumanization of the victim. Maligning the victim is a very frequent neutralization technique used to escape whatever guilt is being felt about the absence of empathy. Whether the process contributed to the lack of empathy in the first place remains unclear. One thing is unquestionable, namely that blaming the victim justifies the lack of sympathy in the eyes of the perpetrator and provides a seemingly valid justification when explaining the victimizing act to others. The often heard claim that “the victim only got what he/she deserved” has become almost a folkloric excuse.

Conclusion
Recent and current armed conflicts in the world, in Ukraine, in the Middle East, in Sudan, to name but a few, not only have drawn attention to, but have provided typical examples of, an important yet neglected phenomenon in Victimology, that of differential or selective empathy. The flagrant contrast in attitude and reaction to the killings, the injuries, the destruction of property, the famines, the suffering, and the displacements, raises the question of how and why identical acts of victimization inflicted on similar victims evoke and generate starkly different levels of empathy, from none at all to high or even extreme levels of empathy. The stark contrast in empathy, in sympathy, in commiseration with the victims that we are currently witnessing first hand in Ukraine, the Middle East or elsewhere is nothing short of overwhelming and definitely requires further exploration and investigation.

As mentioned at the outset, the aim of this essay is not to offer a comprehensive explanation of this interesting, yet enigmatic phenomenon, but simply to bring it to the limelight so it may attract some attention and hopefully ignite a great deal of research. Yes, research is needed to fully understand how the opposing mental processes of humanization and objectification operate to shape the feelings, the emotions and the attitudes of those external observers who are not parties to the conflicts or to the victimizing behavior.

Another current topic worthy of a thorough investigation is the tense and volatile close interactions, as well as the emotional disconnection, that normally exists between captives and captors.

Decades ago (Fattah, 1979) the term “Stockholm Syndrome” was coined and studied. We do not hear about it at present any more! Those close interactions still offer a fertile subject for research and do provide an interesting potential topic for a future essay! ✨

References
# Bove, Tristan (Dec.28; 2022) Fortune Magazine: Women are more empathetic than men, study of hundreds of thousands of people finds—at any age and in any country in the world. CNN (Dec. 26, 2022) Empathy: Women are better at it than men, study finds |


Keffiyeh

SHEILA DELANY

I have a keffiyeh. Should I be worried?

Here’s why I ask. First, if someone doesn’t know, it’s a cotton scarf with a black-and-white or red-and-white fishnet print, worn by people, mostly men, in the Middle East (or West Asia, as it’s now to be called) as a head covering or neck scarf. According to Wikipedia, the word originates in Italian “cuffia” (cap, headwear); it has a complex history as signifier of political or military loyalties in the region.

Why do I have it? To signify support for Palestinian rights. This is no consequence of recent events but goes back a long way. My parents, secular socialist Jews, wanted me and my sister to have some sense of Jewishness, so they enrolled us in a children’s group. There we learned tediously boring songs about Israel. When my parents heard our complaints, they let us quit the group. My sense of good music had made me anti-Zionist long before I ever heard the word.

But back to the keffiyeh: It came from a neighbor in the apartment building next door: Moroccan, airport employee, fluent in Arabic, French and English. I used to serve on Canada Council committees requiring bilingualism, so, although my French was pretty good, I asked him to practise French conversation with me before Ottawa trips or, later, before being interviewed by a Quebec radio program about my translations of eighteenth-century French revolutionary texts. At one of these lessons he wore a keffiyeh; I asked where one could be bought; he brought me one the next day as a gift.

Why might someone worry about wearing a keffiyeh? I won’t discuss the possible reasons offered by the United States, Germany, England or France in this regard but will confine myself to Canada, where the environment grows more toxic every day.

First, let’s consider the IHRA: the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. Canada belongs to this intergovernmental group, along with 35 other governments. Its stated purpose is research about German killing of Jews during World War II, and to counteract “denial and distortion” of the Holocaust. But its actual function is as an arm of Israeli of doing to justify its inhumane treatment of Palestinians and to act with impunity. -- Or: “Using the term ‘Holocaust’ to equate events [unrelated] to the Nazi German genocide” is also anti-semitic; again, something often done by writers or speakers who might well refer to events in Armenia, Africa or elsewhere throughout history (cf. Google) as holocausts or genocides. -- Similarly, “inappropriate comparisons to a contemporary event” are also “antisemitic”. This past December, journalist Masha Gessen had her prestigious Hannah Arendt Prize postponed, for comparing Gaza to a Nazi ghetto. Israeli playwright Motti Lerner references Eichmann’s transport of 4,000 Jewish children to Auschwitz when reading of the 11,000 Palestinian children killed by Israel (so far). -- Also “anti-semitic” are “leaflets, speeches, memes or TikTok videos” that do any of the above. In short, whatever the Israeli government might do to Palestinians cannot be juxtaposed to what happened to Jews. By this standard, holocaust survivors living in Israel must be anti-semites when, as often happens, they denounce current Israeli atrocities as worse than what they lived through.

Although IHRA strictures are not legally binding, they have been adopted by city councils, universities, museums, and so on as guidelines. As a consequence, many people—writers, teachers, doctors, government workers, students—have been penalized, prosecuted, slandered, fired. But with or without explicit use of IHRA, the atmosphere is toxic.

A few instances: Last November, a large group of Vancouver Jews wrote UBC demanding shutdown of any pro-Palestinian or anti Zionist presence on campus whether in class or elsewhere. On January 14, a signer of this letter denounced a local Jewish protest organization for supporting “Islamicists that want to kill you.” The Vancouver Police Department reports that anti-Muslim hate crimes increased recently by 1/3. Natalie Knight, an instructor at Langara and SFU PhD, was fired for describing the October 7 Hamas attack as ‘amazing’ and ‘brilliant’ — a view shared by many military analysts. The local branch of Samidoun, an international group defending Palestinian prisoners, has been attacked by a Zionist organization calling on the Canadian government to ban it. In November, the indigenous curator of Canadian art at the Art Gallery of Ontario was dismissed for expressing solidarity with Palestinians, based on shared experience of colonialism; the museum apparently acted on a letter urging implementation ofIHRA tenets. In Calgary, protesters are harassed and arrested. On January 10, a Toronto man was arrested for “public incitement of hatred” by holding a flag at a demo; police declined to say what flag it was. On January 13, the mayor of Montreal was threatened with a lawsuit for failing to “stop unlawful hate assemblies” (i.e., protests for ceasefire in Palestine). At the University of Ottawa, an experienced public health doctor was suspended for social-media posts sympathizing with Palestine; he has now refused their offer of reinstatement. According to CTV News, six major Canadian universities face class-action lawsuits claiming that Jewish students “feel” or “are unsafe”
on their campuses. Across the country, those calling for a cease-fire are slandered as anti-semites.

And the Canadian government? It continues to supply weaponry to Israel for the slaughter of Palestinian men, women and children. It only belatedly and halfheartedly agreed to “abide by” the judgement of the International Court of Justice in South Africa’s genocide suit against Israel. It has not agreed to deny a second extradition to France for Hassan Diab, a sociologist at Concordia who spent three years in French prison awaiting trial because of the first extradition, was proven innocent by his Canadian and French lawyers (of a 1980 bombing in Paris) and had his case dismissed. The French Zionists want him back: anyone with an Arab-sounding name will do!

Violence has occurred against Jewish targets such as synagogues, schools or private homes, as well as Muslim institutions and individuals. I continue to wear the keffiyeh, occasionally wondering whether some hyper enthusiastic ultra-zionist, encouraged by these and many more incidents and rulings, might try to deprive me of it. Not so far. Inshallah.

---

**Tribute to Walter Piovesan**

**JAY BURR**

When I joined the SFURA Board in 2016, Walter had already served for a year. I was immediately impressed and continued to be throughout our seven years together on the board from which he recently stepped down.

Walter’s career in the SFU Library Data Archives department gave him a solid background in publishing. Serendipitously, he joined the Board just as the SFURA was developing its first book, **Remembering SFU On The Occasion Of Its 50th Birthday**. The late Maurice Gibbons was the editor and together, he and Walter wrestled the book to ongoing success, and enjoyed themselves while doing so. Walter immersed himself in the entire process, cold calling prospective contributors, including the well-known late 1960s radical student leader Martin Loney who was delighted to write a lively article. Walter contacted the printing company and worked closely with Maurice to arrange the final printing. He also worked with Jim Boyd, at the time SFURA President, to finalize both the number of copies and the pricing. He also arranged for the book to be added and listed in the Library and Archives Canada collection.

Thereafter, Walter assumed the job of improving SFURA’s communications: our email lists, our website, and our announcements. During Covid, he set up Zoom for our virtual board meetings. Later, he set up the Eventbrite system for members to register and pay for events, a great improvement.

Most important of these accomplishments has been his work on **Simon Says** as Production Editor and Designer. Though he recently stepped down from the board, he is continuing with the latter.

I vividly remember an amazing brainstorming session among Walter, Frances Atkinson (our current President) and me. We came up with a profoundly different way of financing our activities: to stop collecting dues while getting along without an office assistant. This turned out to be a huge improvement in the way we operate, eliminating a lot of administrative tasks. Not requiring dues opened up membership to all retirees, and membership has quadrupled and participation in our activities has grown substantially.

During our Board meetings, and in the enjoyable lunches afterwards, I remember Walter often steered our discussion to the amazing growth of the Arts that had flowered during the first 10 years of SFU, but fizzled by the late seventies. Walter knew many of the artists and students of the time and was still in contact with some of them. After all, he had been accepted as a Charter student and, whether on campus or painting in Mexico, was actively involved in the Centre for Communications and the Arts. With knowledge and passion, he easily persuaded us that we should publish a book about it, and formally proposed it to the Board in December 2018.

This new book, **A Magical Time: The Early Days of the Arts at Simon Fraser University**, is now ready for publication! It would not have reached this stage without the competent direction of Frances Atkinson, but it would not have started without Walter’s enthusiasm, myriad connections and persistence. Walter directed us to volumes of documents and photos from the period that were stored in the Library Archives. He also interviewed key figures of the period and helped with the production of the book.

These are just a few examples of the many ways that Walter contributed to the evolution of our Retirees Association during the almost nine years he served on the Board.

But what I appreciate the most as a board member has been Walter’s good humour and contagious enthusiasm. These and his always positive attitude have had a profound influence on us.
Socialist Report

The Vancouver Foreign Film Society

TOM O’SHEA


One alternative to attending films in cinemas is to stream online. The choice of online films and series is seriously extensive and diverse. This, however, is usually an individual activity or at best one shared with your significant other, or perhaps even with a few friends and family. It is essentially solitary, not social. It may well serve as a focus for small talk at parties but, in my experience the discussion goes something like “OMG, wasn’t Succession a great series?” “Yeah, I loved it. Have you seen Slow Horses?”

This column is called The Socialist and is focussed on shared experiences, so here is my alternative to the above scenarios. My friend Ian Merkel runs the Vancouver Foreign Film Society, a private film club that you can join and as a member can watch films that the club screens. You can check out his rather shambolic website at van4film.org. He used to organize showings at various private venues, but since Covid has adopted an online model. For $70 you are entitled to download 10 films. Each month he chooses a foreign film that has not been released commercially in North America, but that has been praised by reviewers. He emails members advising what he has chosen that month and using WeTransfer you can download it if you wish. It is yours to keep on your computer (I now have 37 on mine).

This all sounds very ordinary, but the unique feature of this model is that on the last Tuesday of each month Ian convenes a Zoom meeting to discuss the film. Usually we have around 15 people, mostly regulars, to talk about their experience; I have personally met only five of them but I feel I do know the people, mostly regulars, to talk about their experience; I have personally met only five of them but I feel I do know the others through our virtual meetings. Each person is given the opportunity to comment on the film and a general discussion ensues. It becomes a social as well as intellectual experience.

An added benefit of this approach is that it forces one to take film more seriously. Usually Leora and I watch the film as soon as we get it and then watch a second time just before the Zoom meeting in order to make intelligent contributions. Comments may concern any aspect such as the cinematography, the soundscape, continuity, the actors, the plot, and anything else that may please or displease the viewer. A recent film, for example, included a major segment aboard a train travelling through Turkey, but I was seriously bothered by the fact that it showed no interior evidence of motion. Ian records the Zoom sessions and makes them available to any of the members who want to review the discussion.

As I write this we are in Zihuatanejo in Mexico, with little to do but sleep, swim, and eat. The Internet is intermittent. I’m looking through my collection of Ian’s films. Dang, I say, there’s one I don’t remember...Leora, let’s watch this tonight. Thank you, Ian.

Raptors

The Eastern Imperial eagle, handsome, magnificent in flight
A creature heralded an apex predatory wonder
In reality, a primitive scrounging blunderer
No supernal skills, a plodding hunter
Merely mediocre in spotting and swooping
A clumsy fisher less lightning, more thunder
Whose prime feast is carrion
Sometimes inspired to harass and plunder
The catch of fishers and hunters
Who drop their prey to rush back
To save spouse and nestlings
from the invading hooligan pack
A sinister alliance of convenience
Murderous giants, rats with wings
Shrieking in unseemly, feeble voices, none sings

Their target the osprey smaller, swifter and skilled
A master hunter and fisher
Troubles no other, makes a living
Eating only what he has killed
Fresh from the water into which he has plunged
Deep from his relentless hovering in the skies
Deftly his talons have grasped his still living prize
And to prep for the homebound trip
Rotating it like a rocket in his grip
He flies to the nest and feeds his brood
And spouse and lives a simple life of
Good food, sad views over
Their now ravaged steppe.

He closes his eyes only briefly to rest
How long can they hold out alone?
Now is the time for help from a sister, a brother
Too soon he spots with a shudder
The Janus-faced eagles circling his nest.

From: Living with the Creatures of Light and Darkness: Collected Poems / Ehor Boyanowsky.
Canadians travelling to Australia in December pack sunscreen, bathing suits and shorts, after all it’s summer “Down Under.” My family headed out on vacation late last year with those notions in mind. What we got was something quite different. No one mentioned snow, cardigans or hypothermia.

My two sisters, Bonnie and Peigi, and I wanted to take in some cultural events before we ended our vacation and flew home from Sydney with our family group. I read a review that promised a modern take on the opera Carmen, complete with motor bikes, the heroine in leathers and all to be staged in an exotic setting. We couldn’t resist the new approach to the story line for Georges Bizet’s masterpiece: fiery heroine, high drama, passionate love story. It’s a tale of an untamed woman, a matador, bulls, and Don José, a thwarted lover who ends Carmen’s life in this production of the opera by strangling her with a red scarf.

The tickets were booked.

We’ve all seen the iconic Sydney Opera House in tourist brochures, lit by elaborate fireworks on New Year’s Eve; however, not all of their operas are staged on site. Some take place at an arts venue in the middle of Sydney Harbour, on mysterious Cockatoo Island.

We planned to pull swanky clothes out of our suitcases and enjoy a ferry ride from Sydney to the island. We would sit in the summer sun, sipping fine Australian wine, feeling slightly superior to everyone missing out back home in snow-bound Canada.

The clothes went first. Prior to arrival we’d suffered from the illusion that it never snows in Australia and that all summers are boiling hot. The previous week family members had scoured a thrift shop in the Blue Mountains for woolens. This week we were collectively shuddering in the winds off Sydney Harbour. So, we knew what to do when opera organizers recommended that we “wear a cardi” (cardigan or sweater). We pulled on pants, socks and coats and even that wasn’t enough for what was in store.

Stupid enough to sit on the open deck of the ferry, we arrived chilled at Cockatoo Island. Sydney’s sun seemed to have disappeared as we docked in the gloom of the former penal colony. We disembarked and started to trek over eighteen kilometers in a bid to explore the prison buildings. After hearing about the miseries inflicted on everyone, from a starving soul who stole a loaf of bread to rabid serial killers, we were ready to be spoiled.

In the distance, we could see people huddled at picnic tables, open to the elements. Naively we assumed they were for people who chose not to eat in a restaurant. But we were wrong: this was the only eating space available at the opera. We planned to pull swanky clothes out of our suitcases and enjoy a ferry ride from Sydney to the island. We would sit in the summer sun, sipping fine Australian wine, feeling slightly superior to everyone missing out back home in snow-bound Canada.

The clothes went first. Prior to arrival we’d suffered from the illusion that it never snows in Australia and that all summers are boiling hot. The previous week family members had scoured a thrift shop in the Blue Mountains for woolens. This week we were collectively shuddering in the winds off Sydney Harbour. So, we knew what to do when opera organizers recommended that we “wear a cardi” (cardigan or sweater). We pulled on pants, socks and coats and even that wasn’t enough for what was in store.

Stupid enough to sit on the open deck of the ferry, we arrived chilled at Cockatoo Island. Sydney’s sun seemed to have disappeared as we docked in the gloom of the former penal colony. We disembarked and started to trek over eighteen kilometers in a bid to explore the prison buildings. After hearing about the miseries inflicted on everyone, from a starving soul who stole a loaf of bread to rabid serial killers, we were ready to be spoiled.

In the distance, we could see people huddled at picnic tables, open to the elements. Naively we assumed they were for people who chose not to eat in a restaurant. But we were wrong: this was the only eating space available at the opera.

In keeping with the opera’s theme, Spanish food and wine were served. The paella was wonderful, although eaten chilled by the time it reached the table; and Spanish wine is to be recommended!

At long last it was time to queue for the performance. I noticed an usher wearing a Carmen t-shirt and remarked that it would be good to get in from the cold. The look of pity should have been my first clue. We walked around a huge warehouse and found the seating — wide open to the elements, probably to fully celebrate the inclusion of motorbikes, meant to represent raging bulls.

When I was at university, my eldest sister Bonnie treated me (the kid sister) to seasons’ tickets to the Vancouver Opera. We would doll up, dine out and experience wonderful music, fabulous costumes and tragic heroines. You’d think I’d remember one of the most dramatic operas of them all, but my only memory of Carmen was the old refrain: “Toreador, don’t spit on the floor.”

Based on our past experience, we convinced sister Peigi that we would be spoiled for that evening in Sydney, but this felt more like boot camp. Our enthusiasm plummeted the colder it got, with no break in sight. We three sisters — former Yukon denizens — sat huddled together for body heat. Bonnie, the opera lover, was heard to mutter, “If Don José doesn’t strangle Carmen very soon, I’m going to jump up on that stage and do the job myself!”

Fortunately, my sister’s threats would come to naught. We survived until intermission where the lineup for hot beverages ran around the block. When the bell rang to end the break and call the audience back to their seats, guests remained huddled in the only warehouse available for shelter. It took several reminders before we could be persuaded to return.

Luckily, we were inured to the discomfort by then and used old tricks to fend off frostbite, stamping our feet and bouncing up and down in our seats. I was the most fortunate because my sisters served as windbreaks on either side of me. The opera was reaching its end, but we’d lost the ability to celebrate the music, Carmen in black leather, or the skill of the bike riders as bulls.

Once Carmen slumped onto the stage at the end of the performance, her body was barely down before the audience ran out of the venue, all terrified of missing the chartered ferry already docked. We all managed to find seats, inside this time, and as a bonus we didn’t even have to give them up to the elderly, as we all now fit that category!

Looking back at Cockatoo Island, we weren’t reflecting either on an event spent expanding our cultural knowledge or on enjoying the warmth of a summer in the southern hemisphere. We were giving thanks for knowledge gained in the northern hemisphere: the ability to stave off hypothermia.
Canada’s Biggest Threat

EHOR O. BOYANOWSKY

The clock is ticking relentlessly toward judgment day in Canada. Much anxiety is being triggered by the environment as storms start floods and landslides and literally cause trees to fall on people’s heads or interfere with their freedom to commute or even enjoy their parks. Why this sudden acute sense of vulnerability? Because, as our recently completed research has shown, people respond to environmental and social crises only when they feel personally threatened. And it is happening on our streets and in the Arctic.

But there is a far more serious, insidious threat to BC and Canadian society that somehow remains largely unrecognized though everyday we see its counterpart in the extreme violence brought down on the heads of innocent civilian populations in Palestine and Israel, in Somalia, not so long ago in Rwanda. And even in the former Yugoslavia, with the conviction of Radovan Karadžić, a medical doctor for crimes against humanity. Many still bemusedly remember the beauty of that country and the friendliness of its people during the Sarajevo Olympic Games when such interethnic savagery, given the sophisticated charm of the place, could not have even been contemplated in any rational Olympic tourist’s imagination.

Recently, colleagues at the universities of Hong Kong and BC and I published an analysis of the conditions that led to such carnage. What we concluded was that hatred and extreme mass violence are fomented against ethnic minorities who are seen as unfairly privileged when superordinate egalitarian superstructures, whether political or religious, collapse and rather than national or other inclusive identities prevailing, people are identified by their tribal origins or as members of outgroups. Anger and resentment and memory of injustices or mere ideology and religion then inevitably trigger violence and slaughter when people are no longer merely Rwandans but become Hutus and Tutsis, no longer Yugoslavians but Serbs and Croats and Muslims, even in the Ukraine no longer Ukrainians or even Soviet citizens but bourgeois farmers versus communists. That distinction justified the slaughter, in one year, 1932, of six to eight million Ukrainian farmers, the century’s largest, though perhaps least known, genocide. The victims’ only sin: efficient, productive farming on independent farms. Pol Pot made a similar distinction in Cambodia between true communist peasants and the enemy, those who were at least minimally educated (identified by their spectacles) to justify the killing fields. The educated had to be eliminated.

What has any of that to do with Canada, a country founded on the principle of equality by people hoping to escape the status and ethnic elitism and subsequent conflicts that have plagued most of the world whether Asia or Europe or Africa? Alas, a great deal. The first potentially lethal step was taken with the signing of the Nisga’a Treaty creating an immense semi-sovereign state in northern British Columbia wherein the only people who have full citizenship are members of the Nisga’a nation (or whomever the Nisga’a parliament wishes to make a citizen – ordinary Canadians are relegated to second class status though Nisga’a as retain full Canadian citizenship elsewhere in Canada). Some dissident Nisga’a as, notably Chief Mountain and Mercy Thomas, have led a court battle to have the treaty declared illegal as it creates a third order of government not contemplated in the Canadian Constitution. A study my student Joe Nedelec completed years ago found that when asked, members of the British Columbia public strongly felt the tenets of the treaty and the Nisga’a state it created had far more potential for conflict than the structure of the state of Israel even when the two states described were identified only by mythical names. A chilling finding for we all know the amount of violence and death the existence of the state of Israel has spawned in Palestine, though established, like BC’s treaty process, in the light of past injustices, with the best of intentions.

Why then has the Nisga’a treaty and the whole process not inspired more concern among British Columbians? Two reasons. First, as our theory propounded and my student now Professor Omi Hrodwisz, to her dismay, confirmed in her study, people only spring into action in situations when they feel personally threatened. Nisga’a territory seems very far away and remote from the everyday lives of ordinary citizens. But not everyone’s: the Fishermen’s Survival Coalition had opposed “race-based” commercial fisheries granted to aboriginal groups wherein only members of specific nations are allowed to harvest fish for commerce while the majority of commercial fishermen sit idly by. The irony is that First Nations, though a tiny minority of British Columbians, already make up approximately 40 percent of commercial fishers, and in addition, are allowed to fish for “food, social and ceremonial purposes” often to the tune of several hundred pounds for every man, woman and child in their nation. Their exclusive commercial fishery is added on. In a chilling decision, on June 27th, 2008 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled such discriminatory fisheries were acceptable, thereby plunging another dagger into the open wound that is the relationship between aboriginal and ordinary Canadians.

Their decision is the canker spewing vitriol produced by a whole generation of lawyers and judges who have been contaminated with faulty thinking by their mentors, law
professors exemplified by Hamar Foster in his article in the Vancouver Sun (Jan 8, 2007). Foster simplistically argued that the commercial fishery is not racist “because simply being ‘Indian’ is not enough. An aboriginal person who is not a member of the treaty group can no more participate in a treaty fishery without permission than a non-aboriginal person can.” Such thinking would construe exclusion from a men’s club was not racist for barring Jews, Slavs, aboriginal people because being, for example, a non-Jew - a gentle - was not sufficient for membership; wealth, status and referrals from club members are also required. He argues that aboriginals already owned the fishery. Perhaps, but is that not why we negotiate treaties now that they no longer live here alone? It follows from his thinking that the land, earth, water, the very air one breathes, should be returned to the original occupants.

Treaties must be negotiated, or better yet, individual compensation made to persons so that they can enjoy the fruits of negotiations while they are still alive, and can harmonize their new found wealth with a larger economy to contribute to a prosperous country. That is why I served for ten years on the Aboriginal Treaty Negotiation Advisory Committee. To ensure that Indigenous people are properly compensated for their land. Surely, we do not want to negotiate over 50 armed ethnic solitudes wherein only a few of the ordained royalty, based on genealogy, suck the wealth from the resources available without needing to be personally productive and secrete or squander their wealth offshore. That dubious state exists in Saudi Arabia where the princes, once a ragamuffin few, now grown to many thousands of unproductive royal family members, are parasites on their rich land while the vast majority of their fellow citizens wallow in poverty. People in societies structured like that are prime targets for hatred, conflict and inevitably, insurrection. Hence the attack by Hamas on Israel, even though it is the only country I would consider living in in the Middle East. And indeed, it could happen there, or anywhere that the right conditions prevail. Alas even in Canada.

Ehor Boyanowsky
Retired, School of Criminologys

Guide to Choosing Extended Health Care and Travel Insurance

Newly revised by Jay Burr and the SFURA Benefits Committee, this guide compares features of the three group plans available to SFU retirees that provide Extended Healthcare (EHC) insurance and offers suggestions to help you choose among them. These are group plans with premiums that do not depend on your age or medical conditions. Since our first edition in early 2020, one of these has substantially improved benefits and another has become available since then. ([https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/Travel_and_Health_Insurance.html](https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/Travel_and_Health_Insurance.html))

We describe Travel Medical Plans suitable for SFU retirees that provide coverage for travel medical emergencies. We explain why some of these should be avoided because they are not 1st payers. The premiums for individual travel medical insurance plans depend strongly on trip length, age and medical condition. Because one of our group EHC plans offers good travel medical coverage that is independent of these conditions, your decision on both healthcare and travel insurance becomes complicated by your plans for travel, your age, and medical condition. With this guide we hope to help you through this confusing decision-making process.

Summary

We have described features of three EHC plans available to SFU retirees, some individual Travel Medical plans and Trip plans of interest. We provide links to websites and plan booklets that lead to further details. To make good choices, a retiree needs to evaluate them in the light of their individual needs. Some additional considerations are:

The EHC benefits of the Pacific Blue Cross (PBC) plan have been significantly improved. They are now somewhat better than those offered by the Retired Teachers of Ontario (RTO) and Green Shields Canada (GSC) plans.

The PBC EHC plan can only be started upon retirement and cannot be renewed if canceled, whereas the RTO and GSC plans can be started or stopped at any time if a group plan like the PBC, RTO or GSC plan is currently held.

CUPE and PolyParty retirees, who are no longer eligible for the PBC EHC plan, can subscribe to the RTO plan upon retirement.

When the $150,000 lifetime maximum in your PBC or GSC plan is approached, you can switch to the RTO plan.

Individual Travel Medical plans are available at low cost for younger, healthier retirees. But their premiums depend strongly on age and medical condition.

The RTO EHC plan also includes good travel medical benefits. Since its premium is independent of age or medical condition, it would be of interest to older retirees or those with certain health conditions. These retirees could supplement their EHC plan with this plan in years that they travel.
My Mother Parul: A Rare Flower

Parul is a scarce flower
The flowers bloom in April, available in the forest
Bloom at the end of the branches that have fragrance
Long and hairy flower bud
The petals vary from deep violet to rosy!

My mother, named Parul, was like a flower, a unique persona in her own clan
Born in Fakirbari, a well-known neighbourhood of Barisal district town in Bangladesh.
Raised in a large joint family!

Dark skinned slender body, medium height and magnificent black eyes
Long black hair soaked in oil up to end of her heap
The Jobakushum oil preserved hair vastly black even in her eighties
Immaculate at home when Parul observed seclusion
Ironed white uniform saree at workplace when discarded veil for economic security!

It was undivided India under the British rule
Muslim women were seldom visible in high school, let alone higher education!
Parul wearing a burqa in a horse drawn cart attended Sadar Girls’ High school
Passed Matriculation exam under the Calcutta Board
Parul got a scholarship—allocated for Muslim women—for Delhi medical school
The clan instead arranged a marriage that doomed her vision to be a doctor!

My mother’s conjugal life lasted for a decade
My father, leaving behind four infant daughters, suddenly passed away
Parul’s shelter, coziness as well security evaporated overnight
Stayed with her in-laws in a village of Barisal—Dudhalmow—for a year!

The clan prevented Parul and her daughters from further catastrophe
Her generous uncle Chan Chacha persuaded Parul
To attend Mymensingh Teachers Training College, far away from her familiar world
Leaving daughters with four relatives—three in Barisal and one in Dhaka
Parul diligently attended the college, lodged in a dorm, and trained as a schoolteacher
Upon completion of training, Parul landed, however, on a government job
Visionary Chan Chacha inspired Parul to be a customs officer, a job nobody envisioned!

Parul’s first posting was in Premtali, Rajshahi—a remote place in early 60s
A horse driven cart tomtom was the transport between Rajshahi and Premtali
Premtali was situated on the banks of mighty River Padma
An official border station between Rajshahi, then East Pakistan and Murshidabad, India
Boat was the sole transport for all kind of freights including mango

My Mom left two of us in Barisal with her parents for education, kept two infant daughters
Encountered harsh realities in a remote village far away from the extended family
Rented a mud-house without locks, no toilet and shower
Let’s not imagine electricity and running water!

Parul’s intelligence, wisdom, audacity, perseverance overshadowed the harsh realities!
As a customs officer, she also worked in Benapole, Darshana, Barisal, and Khulna
Her decade long serving station was Benapole, a land border between India and Bangladesh
Met with countless remarkable individuals at the Beanpole border station.
As a dazzling storyteller, Parul skillfully transmitted workplace experience to her daughters!
Parul witnessed World War II, the short-lived India-Pakistan War in 1965, Liberation War in Bangladesh in 1971, Famine in 1974, and several national tragedies.

Her endurance, bravery, determination overpowered countless adversaries.

Life was always beautiful to her!

As a non-materialist person, Parul barely gathered wealth.

Departed this world in her sleep at home as a property-less woman.

Well-dressed, cherished relatives, friends, and colleagues.

Parul enjoyed her life to the fullest extent!

Educating daughters while preserving dignity and self-esteem was her motto.

As a mother, she was empathetic, taught life-skills, and nursed me in sickbed like an angel.

Parul, an eloquent speaker, was an adorable person to her clan and distant relatives.

Her brothers, sisters, and countless cousins addressed Parul as “Buji”, the senior sister.

Left behind an unwavering effect on the dearest ones around the world.

Her charming personality is fondly remembered by the nearest and dearest ones.

My mother Parul, as a woman, was ahead of her generation in wisdom and actions!

© HABIBA ZAMAN

A Tea Tale

Degree of embarrassment on spilling tea is less when alone and at home – carpet cleaning tools are close, damp clothes can be changed, and no damage done.

Think what would ensue in company – in their space, not my own – all jump up, sop up with napkins, handkerchiefs, whatever is handy – spilled tea on slacks and shoes, apologies flying, so sorry, so sorry, so sorry – bumping heads as we bend to mop up the mess.

Oh, my friend! Solitude does have its charms..

© JARED CURTIS
Drama chez moi or how an Apple saved my life.

Marilyn Bowman

I pride myself on being resourceful when I encounter problems, and I was recently tested to some kind of limit with dramas in my household, in a townhouse, in an enclosed complex.

My car was totalled by an SUV running through a red light at 5:45 am as I was driving to my regular coffee shop, 2 days before I was due to leave town on a 28-day sea trip. As I was being hauled away by the ambulance, I mentioned to the ambulance man that I had tried to dial 911, but had problems. He replied – “We didn’t get your 911 call, we got the call from your Apple Watch!!” WOW.

VGH x-ray showed no broken ribs and gave me a note ‘clearing’ me for travel. My chest was hurt but as long as there were no broken ribs, I figured the enforced rest on many ‘at sea’ days would be a good thing to hold me down; otherwise I would be rushing around fixing things. But the crash meant that I had no car to come home to, would have to deal with rentals, ICBC, and the witness.

On my return, I had trouble finding him. He had rushed to give me his phone number at the accident site (“I saw it all”), but on my return the phone number did not work. I managed to track down his address on the internet but discovered he had moved out of his home with no forwarding address or phone number, so my status could not be established as the innocent party with ICBC. On my first return day, when I woke up as usual at 5:45 for my regular run to my coffee shop, I heard on the radio there was a transit strike, so I needed to rent a car vite before the big rush for car rentals hit. I went online, tracked down an economy outfit, booked a car for a week, got out to the airport with a drive from a helpful neighbour, got the shuttle to the car rental, got the car. Whew!

The next day when I woke up: no hot water, although it had worked perfectly the first day of my return. I rushed down into the basement to look at the hot water tank, found water leaking out the bottom, and the pilot light unresponsive. A new tank was needed. After fruitless attempts to get a plumber who could come, (several were still busy with burst pipe jobs from the winter storm), I managed to find one who could work on it that day after I sent photos and measurements to let them find the right tank. The young plumber arrived in the early afternoon and began work in my basement while my rental car stayed out in the heavy rain.

Just as the plumber was finishing up installing the new hot water heater, in the dark of the late afternoon heavy rainstorm, the huge downpour caused the gutter along the front of my house to clog. This created a huge waterfall cascading down over the gutter, and running up to my house-front rather than off into the garden because the concrete was badly laid originally. I accidentally discovered this flood, and quickly began frantically trying to sweep the water away from the house front in the dark, pouring rain. But I needed to stop the flow by getting up into the gutter to clear it, so I ran through my house to my back patio, hauled my wet stepladder from there through the house and onto the front patio.

A neighbour’s husband was rather ineffectually waving his hands wanting to be helpful, but failing. I was getting ready to climb up the stepladder in the black downpour even though it scared me as I’m not very stable, when the young plumber came up from the basement to get paid for finishing the hot water tank job. Quick as a wink he saw the situation, saw the 83-year-old soaking-wet me dragging the ladder. He grabbed it into a better location, climbed up and cleared out the clogged gutter!! Whooosh! All clear. Whew!!! and Hallelujah!

As Ron at our Gatehouse so helpfully had told me the day before this drama: trouble comes in threes, so with the car crash, the hot water system dead, and the flood, I think I’m finished with my share for quite a while.

The wonders of chicken-wire

Preparing for a previous storm season I wanted chicken-wire, to roll up and lay down in my gutter to catch leaves. It lets the water flow easily thru and be easily shaken clean if it traps leaves. I have found a number of commercial ‘leaf-catching’ devices all pretty close to useless. I trekked out to Kerrisdale Lumberyard below the Oak St. bridge, basically a huge operation for building contractors. I wandered in looking for chicken-wire and was sent off into the hinterlands of the giant place. I found many big rolls of different kinds of chicken-wire and a nice, helpful young man. The big rolls were about one yard wide, but I only wanted 12 inches worth. I told the nice young man what I needed and he carefully cut me 12 inches of it. I wended my way back to the cashier in a different building, told her I had 12 inches. She just looked at me and laughed. “You’re fine, no charge” They both thought it was a hoot. At home I carefully cut off a length of about 1 foot using my kitchen shears for chicken bones, tucked in all the spiky edges, climbed up on my stepladder and laid it down in my back patio gutter, where it works beautifully. Today I climbed up on my stepladder and put in a similar package into my front gutter, which faces the same conditions.

I’m ready for anything now!!! ✨
A Bike And A Dike: A Great Nature Experience

RON LONG

I’m fortunate. In the Port Moody area I have easy access to over 250 kilometres of dikes along the Fraser, Pit and Alouette rivers. Each dike provides a direct conduit into nature and each dike provides a different experience. I would not commit several hours to hike 10,12 or 14 kilometres every day, but I do commit one hour every day to ride the same distances. I ride slowly, stay alert and stop often so I don’t miss much. Only heavy rain, wind or snow prevent my ride so I am out most days of the year.

There is no better way to begin each day than with an early morning ride regardless of weather.

I choose a different dike each day and nature encounters are different each day.

Three coyote pups playing on the dike.

The dramatic tail slap of a diving beaver.

An osprey suddenly folding its wings and plunging from a great height into the water, emerging with a fish - directly in front of me.

A huge log sailing dramatically up the Pitt River, pushed by the incoming tide.

A river otter suddenly appearing on the dike right in front of me. Seen close-up, they are big.

A Coyote, hunting along the opposite dike, glowingly backlit by the sunrise.

The abrupt migration trigger that causes nearly all the overwintering water birds to leave, all at the same time and from one day to the next.

Bird encounters are continuous. Every day I sit on a bench with my phone out and Merlin running. Merlin is an app that listens for birds then provides a name and a photograph for each bird it hears. In this way my knowledge of the huge variety of our local birds has increased exponentially and in the most enjoyable way possible. By sitting quietly and keeping alert to every twitch of a branch, I have made sightings of many small and sometimes rare birds. In the same tree I photographed a Yellow-rumped Warbler, an Orange-crowned Warbler and a Common Yellowthroat.

Thanks to Merlin I have had sightings of rarely seen birds such as Bullock’s Oriole and I even managed to catch a photograph of a Lazuli Bunting.

One early morning I sat on a remote bench watching the activity around an Osprey nest. The quiet was magnificent - seemingly enhanced by the bird calls I was hearing in every direction.

With binoculars I followed one of the ospreys as it approached the nest with a fish. Suddenly an eagle dove into my view and began chasing the osprey in an obvious attempt to force it to drop the fish. The osprey dodged and turned for some time when its mate showed up and dove on the eagle.

The eagle flew off as did the Osprey mate, but the eagle reappeared and continued the chase. Next, the eagle mate arrived and joined the harassment which eventually became too much for the osprey and it finally did drop the fish. As I followed the falling fish with the binoculars, the eagle neatly side slipped and snatched it in midair - amazing precision for such a large bird.

There are three key elements that contribute to my best nature experiences.

The dikes are popular so I go early. At dawn wildlife activity is at its peak and people and dogs, that tend to push wildlife away from the dike, are few.

I go alone. Having even one other person along removes the immersive quality that is so important.

I go every day. This has allowed me to become familiar with the ever fascinating continuum of life along the dikes.

This is ecotherapy at its absolute best.

PHOTO: OSPREY / RON LONG

PHOTO: YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER / RON LONG

PHOTO: / RON LONG
A Valentine for Teachers

MEGUIDO ZOLA

T

his is a Valentine. A Valentine in honour of teachers everywhere; and one teacher, in particular.

I’m ten. Wearing khaki shorts tapered down to my knees, starched white cotton shirt, blue bow tie on an elastic band and, in my top pocket, a red hankie wrapped around a piece of cardboard to keep it stiff.

“Why are you doing this to me?” I complain to my mother, as she prims me for school. “You know I don’t like to be left with strangers.”

My first day.


New land: Stone Town in Zanzibar Sultanate and British Protectorate. Not Cairo, Egypt.


A soft, humid breeze blows into the classroom from the sea; I listen to the soughing of the wind in the palm trees and the cawing of crows in the baobabs.

Aram translates the teacher’s English into his native Omani for me; it is not the Arabic dialect I grew up with in Cairo, but I make sense of it.

In the small, crowded classroom, we sit at long tables, on hard, wooden benches, boys and girls together, each with an empty space on the right: this is for our guardian angel, ready to protect and guide.

In the playground, when Mother Superior bears down on me, headress flapping like the ears of an elephant in musk, my guardian angel is not there. I scream and throw sand in Mother Superior’s face.

In Scripture, when Sister Mercy raps me with her pointer, my guardian angel is again not there. I tear off Sister Mercy’s crucifix.

But Teacher Violet is calm. Cool-cool as a dog’s nose. Teacher Violet is the young, indigenous apprentice-teacher for Standard IV.

“Ooo . . .  You not bad boy!” she squeezes my shoulder playfully: “you just a little short of marks in Conduct. And Deportment.”

After a month, my report card notes I am 51st out of 51 in Obedience, Respectfulness, and Politeness.

But Teacher Violet is full of hope:


Teacher Violet wears a white frangipani in her wild hair. Her red, red lips flash a dazzling smile. Her long, brown, prettily sandaled legs ply tirelessly from desk to desk. And when she leans over to help me with my seatwork, I breathe in her heady perfume.

“Quicker than a nun’s kiss,” she reassures me, “you going be speak English like pukka gentleman.

I smile up at her.

But,” urging me on, “we got to get more busy than safari ants at picnic.”

Teacher Violet finds me cowrie shells to replace the ones I was cheated out of playing kaudi, bao, and pachisi.

Teacher Violet places me under the wing of Farrokh (Farrokh Bulsara: later, Freddie Mercury, founder of the British rock band Queen) born to Indian Parsee (Zoroastrians from Persia) parents in Zanzibar.

At the end of the year, my school report proclaims I’m top in Grammar. Top in Dictation. Top in Reading. I even have 87.5 out of 100 in School Spirit.

Many years later, after the death of my parents, some of my childhood mementos come to me in a tin trunk. And there’s a black and white deckle-bordered photograph of Teacher Violet, just as I remember her.

Except that her name, it seems, is not Violet. It’s Rose. And behind the dazzling smile, I see something I hadn’t noticed: deep craters pockmark her face, and part of her nose is missing — the ravages of childhood smallpox? I notice, too, her front teeth are broken. Family violence?

And how young she is. Just a teenager, really. Probably with little more than elementary schooling, herself. Violet, Rose — no matter. A rose by any other name...

The fragrance of her memory has stayed with me through my schooling. Nurturing my innermost being, those parts others could never reach.

And still, today, in my classroom work with teachers, I encounter Teacher Violet. Catch sight of her in a teacher’s smile; an encouraging nod; a knowing wink.

Hear her in a question asked for the student’s sake, not the teacher’s. Feel her in a teacher’s reassuring touch to a child; a hug.

And I marvel. At the potential. The potential to make a difference in a life. And redeem that life through nothing more—though nothing less—than acceptance, hope, encouragement.

In that moment, it’s all I can do to stop myself calling out, as I search behind that teacher’s eyes:

“Is that you, Teacher Violet? It’s me... remember? You taught me English. And Conduct. And Deportment.”

PHOTOHONTAGE: MEG BOULDEN & TIRZA VAN DIJK BY WP/ JUNSPLASH
“Sasquatch Country,” is a place close to Harrison Hot Springs. This has become not only our home for retirement, but is also the world’s largest concentrated winter eagle gathering from the middle of October to early January. Why? The raptors are drawn to the area by the millions of spawning salmon that travel up the Fraser River to tributaries such as the Harrison River, which is also a certified Salmon Stronghold. Every year we witness the salmon run and the eagles and cannot help but take amazing photos of nature’s happening. Everything is just a few minutes down the road from us, and during all our eventful retired years we were able to capture thousands of eagles; some of them are sold as canvasses in Galleries and shops around here, others were displayed in the local newspaper. We not only captured them on camera, but over the years learned about their different behaviours, characteristics and expression. Living surrounded by nature is making our retirement both relaxing and exciting at the same time.

Simon Fraser University Retiree Association Benefits Committee Update

JOAN SHARP

Over the last couple of years, the Simon Fraser University Retiree Association Benefits Committee has worked towards improvements in retirees’ extended health care benefits. You can read Jim Boyd’s summary of the significant improvements approved by the SFURA Benefits Committee and the University last year in the summer 2023 SFURA newsletter or on the SFURA website. The Benefits Committee is meeting again this spring to explore possible improvements to retirees’ dental and extended health benefits.

Jay Burr, a member of the Benefits Committee, has revised and updated his very useful Guide to Extended Health Care and Travel Insurance Plans for SFU Retirees [https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/Travel_and_Health_Insurance.html]. This useful Guide compares features of the three group plans available to SFU retirees that provide Extended Healthcare (EHC) insurance and offers suggestions to help you choose among them. The Guide also describes Travel Medical Plans suitable for SFU retirees that provide coverage for travel medical emergencies. It explains why some of these should be avoided because they are not first payers. Premiums for individual travel medical insurance plans depend strongly on trip length, age, and medical condition. Because one group, the EHC Plan, offers good travel medical coverage that is independent of these conditions, your decision on both healthcare and travel insurance becomes complicated by your plans for travel, your age, and medical condition. This Guide will help you through this confusing decision-making process.

If you have questions about retiree benefits or recommendations for the SFURA Benefits Committee, please email Joan Sharp (jsharp@sfu.ca). A Q&A section will be included in each SFURA newsletter and a FAQ list assembled from the questions and answers will be posted on the SFURA website: https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/Travel_and_Health_Insurance.html

Question: My prescription is not among the drugs listed in the Pacific Blue Cross Blue RX formulary under SFU retirees’ extended health coverage. The drug is similar to other medications on Health Canada’s list of approved drugs. How can I appeal denial of payment for my medication?

Answer: One of our members wrote to the Benefits Review Committee, Pacific Blue Cross, PO Box 7000, Vancouver, BC, V6B 4E1, appealing the lack of coverage for an eye drop prescription. He provided the following reasons:

▫ According to documentation on the Blue Rx plan, Blue RX covers brand-name and generic prescriptions for drugs used to treat all major diseases and conditions. This drug is a generic version of the drugs that already appear on the Blue RX formulary.
▫ From the Blue Rx plan, “There are a very small number of drugs that are not covered under Blue RX. These excluded drugs typically have similar therapeutic benefits to ones already covered by Blue RX but are much more costly.” The rejected drug is a generic version of other approved drugs, likely with a smaller cost.

Outcome: The claim was paid for our member and the drug was added to the Blue RX formulary.

Simon Says | Spring 2024
A Bike Ride Through Indonesia

JOHN WATERHOUSE

Since my retirement from SFU I have done eight long-distance bicycle rides. In total I rode about 40,000 Km or a distance equal to the circumference of the earth at the equator, covering the period from June 2012 to December 2019. During that time, I spent about 65 weeks “on tour”, or more than a year in the saddle of my bike. The eight trips covered fifty-one different countries. The following is about my ride through Indonesia.

The Indonesian Ride

The fourth most populous country in the world, Indonesia is a country rich in history and natural wonders, from active volcanoes to the Spice Islands. Our ride started in Sumatra, the most northerly and westerly of the major islands then traversed Java, Bali, Lombok, Sumbawa, Flores, and Timor, about 5,500 Kms of riding. Medan, our starting place, is on the east coast of Sumatra, about halfway from the north to the south. It is hot, muggy, chaotic, and less than a tourist mecca. Lonely Planet says, “sometimes pops up as the worst place you will ever visit.”

Eighteen riders, ranging in age from eighteen to sixty-nine (me), and from many countries, started the trip. About one-half were women. Other riders came and left during stages during the trip and not all who started finished. I do not believe that any other group before or since has ridden Indonesia as we did.

The Ride Through Sumatra

Our route took us due west, across Sumatra then down the west coast to Kalinda where we took a ferry to Java. Day 1, August 18, from Medan to Berestagi was only 63 Km but about 1300m up and on a terrible road. It was hot and humid, and the traffic was horrendous. I am sure that the buses and trucks burned palm oil. I know that they spew out huge clouds of black smoke. Not pleasant for cyclists.

What day one caused in grief, day two made up for in beautiful scenery, pleasant weather, and good roads. 120 Km started with passing an active volcano, Mount Sinabung, with smoke and steam coming from the top of a perfect cone. Our route took us through orange groves, pepper farms, and countless small villages. The people seemed extremely poor and were incredibly friendly. I cannot count the times that I heard “hello mister” as I passed, and I cannot help but wonder what the locals must have thought as they saw a bunch of people dressed in what must have seemed to them to be ridiculous garb, peddling bicycles. Perhaps they pitied us for being so poor that we could not afford motor bikes.

The terrain along the west coast of Sumatra is jungle marked by deep river gulleys. A 120 Km ride might begin and end at sea level but cover more than 1,000m of elevation up and down the coastal gulleys. Each one is only fifty or so meters high but the bridges over the river at the bottom were invariably in terrible shape so one could not carry any speed into what might be a 15% up-grade.

Sumatra is a difficult ride for a combination of reasons. It is hot. The roads are mostly in poor to atrocious shape. Traffic is heavy and constant. Air pollution is a problem. The food is strange, and the accommodations are “mixed.” But the killer is the elevation gains. On Sumatra we climbed the equivalent of twice the height of Everest. Nonetheless, the ride was magnificent.

My journal entry of the stretch from Krui to Gistang, two towns on the west coast close to the southern end of Sumatra, gives a flavor of the riding experience. This is a 141 Km ride, which was a bit on the longish side but not unusual. I quote from my journal:

“... lots of steep climbing, off the bike to push a couple of times just because the grade was so steep. The highlight of the day was a 30 Km ride through a national park with thick jungle that closed in on both sides of the road. There was little traffic so one could easily hear the jungle sounds. Millions of insects all vying for airtime, overlayed by a cacophony of bird calls and punctuated by the calls of monkeys, baboons, and unidentified creatures. This was a magical experience.”

The Ride Through Java

Java was the second island on our journey. It is a 32 Km ferry ride from Kalinda, Sumatra to Carita, Java. With a population of 140 million, in an area smaller than England, Java is a densely populated volcanic island. Our route did not avoid volcanoes, active or dormant.

The real meaning of volcanic became too clear on our third day in Java. The riding notes indicated a shortish 71 Km ride with an elevation gain of 2,500m. That is a lot. The payoff was incredible scenery as we passed through the different climate and agricultural zones. At the bottom, logging in the rainforest, ascending to coconut groves, fruit farms, vegetable farms of cabbage, garlic, beans and much more, and at the top, tea plantations with their perfectly manicured beds of tea plants that stretch for kilometers. The agricultural variety and productivity of this area is astounding. I had no idea that there could be so many shades of green as we saw ascending that mountain. Spectacular is an understatement.

The largest city on our route through Java was Yogyakarta, the only royal city in Indonesia still ruled by a Sultan. This is a city with deep academic, artistic, and cultural roots. At the time of this ride, I was chair of the board of Academics Without Borders, an organization that aids universities in developing countries. One of our projects was at the State Islamic University of Yogyakarta where we helped establish and operate a Center for Students with Disabilities. I had the pleasure of visiting the students and staff on this project and was deeply touched by their accomplishments.

Five riding days and 520 Kms to the east brought us to the Bromo Tengger park, home to the Bromo volcanos. Our hotel...
was perched on the edge of the volcano’s lip, overlooking a broad basin of fine dust which had once been the active part of the volcano. Two smaller volcanoes have erupted in the howl and one of them is still active.

Before leaving Java, I want to pass along my observations on traffic. If the population of Java is 125 or so million then there must be at least that number of motor scooters and motorcycles. They are everywhere and driven by everyone and serve every purpose. Overall, it is quite amazing that people seem to scoot in and out of the tightest spots without incident. I liken motorbike traffic to a school of fish that ebbs and flows with apparent direction and purpose around obstacles and responds to imperceptible cues.

**Bali, Lombok, Flores, Sumbawa, and Timor**

The transition from Java to Bali was remarkable. One could go for weeks in Java without seeing another Caucasian face or trace of western culture or food. Bali is a tourist haven, especially for Australians. So, western influence is pervasive, prices are high, and the feel of the place is much different from Java.

The next island, Lombok, is markedly different again in the climate and topography. It is dryer and more desolate with a much lower population density and the land is much less fertile. While in some ways, Lombok is a Bali wannabe, it has a long way to go. There are fewer tourists, there is much less traffic, and it is much poorer. That said, our rest day in Sengiggi was at a hotel on a very pleasant beach.

What did not change from island to island is how friendly and generous the locals are. We stopped for lunch one day on the grounds of a fish restaurant. Even though we had our own lunch fixings, the family who ran the restaurant served us iced coconut drinks with hot tea and cake for dessert. At lunch one of our hosts noticed road rash on my leg. As we were joking about my fall, the matriarch of the establishment, dressed in full Muslim garb, joined us, and indicated that she also had road rash. She proceeded to hike up her dress so that we could compare our leg wounds.

As we proceeded from Lombok and Sumbawa to Flores, the islands became very dry and desolate. Nothing is green by the end of the dry season.

Closing in on Dili, we are approximately 5,500 Km from our starting point. Neither Kupang on Flores nor Ende on Timor, have much going for them. Both are backwater ports, although Kupang is a bit larger and has the regional government and a university which give it a marginally greater cosmopolitan feel. I would not recommend either of them to even a desperate to get off the beaten track traveler.

Timor is not volcanic but was created by an uplifting of an ancient seabed, much as the Rocky Mountains were. Geologically speaking, Timor has more in common with Australia than with the rest of Indonesia. The soil is much less fertile and agriculturally less productive. The people seem much poorer, this from a low standard. The people look different from those on other islands. They are heavier set with Polynesian features as opposed to Malayan, Chinese or Indian.

Eastern Timor was a Portuguese colony rather than a Dutch colony as was much of the rest of Indonesia and Western Timor. There are more Christians than Muslims in East Timor and I think that we have heard our last 4:30 AM call to prayers. Some claim, and I think that I agree, that the people have more of an edge here than in the western parts of the country. East Timor which was at war with Indonesia until quite recently is an economic basket case with the lowest per person income in Asia. Their currency is the US dollar, and the official language is Portuguese.

Next is travel to and two rest days in Darwin. Civilization!! (Although many Australians do not consider Darwin to be civilized). ✤

---

John Waterhouse, who has written about his cycling adventures in Indonesia in this edition of ‘Simon Says’ has now had his book republished by the SFURA as an e-publication and is freely available as an ebook. Those who wish to make a donation to SFU Student Scholarships in lieu of payment may do so.

The eBook is available at The PDF of Cycling’s Ten Life Lessons is now available in SFU’s Summit at https://summit.sfu.ca/item/37910
It is also available on Apple Books https://www.apple.com/ca/apple-books/
The sun emits many different types of radiation with different wavelengths, the rays or waves that concern us here are the ultraviolet (UV), visible light spectrum and infrared radiation. The rays in the visible spectrum have a range of wavelengths, they are capable of exciting cells in our retina and let us see objects around us in colours varying from violet to red. In the visible spectrum, radiation giving us the perception of violet colour, has the shortest wavelengths (around 400 nanometers) while those letting us see red have longer wavelengths (around 700 nm); the rest are in between. Infrared, with wavelength longer than 7000 nm, is not perceived by our eyes, it is sensed by our temperature receptors. We feel it as heat. UV rays, with wavelengths shorter than 400 nm, also do not excite our retinal cells for vision, but they interact with cells of the body. UV rays are deceptive because their effects cannot be felt immediately. Their effects are felt only after they have done damage to the cells. On the skin UV radiation causes sunburn; if eyes are not protected they can cause temporary or permanent damage to the retinal cells. It is very important never to look directly at the sun. Let us consider the contribution of three agents, namely, the sun, the moon and humans on human health during solar eclipse.

Eclipse or no eclipse, the sun keeps working like any other time. During a solar eclipse... the sun is not affected

The sun, the moon and humans on human health during solar eclipse.

On Wellness

An Eclipsed Sun

PARVEEN BAWA

North America will experience another solar eclipse on April 8, 2024; many enthusiasts will be flying to view it anywhere along its path starting from Mexico and moving on to Eastern Canada. Those on its path will be looking for appropriate glasses, covers for their cameras and telescopes so as not to damage their eyes and the camera sensors. Cautions from different media will be everywhere, "DO NOT LOOK AT THE ECLIPSE DIRECTLY, IT WILL DAMAGE YOUR EYES". No one ever explains if the sun becomes more dangerous during the eclipse because during sunny days we are fine going around wearing ultraviolet (UV) protected sunglasses. Does the sun radiate some dangerous rays or germs during the eclipse?

If the sun’s radiation does not change during the eclipse, and the moon actually decreases some of the radiation reaching us, then why are all the cautionary measures broadcast just before an eclipse? The answer lies not in the physics but physiological reflexes and reactions of humans, especially those of our eyes. On a normal sunny day, there is a lot of light, our pupils are constricted maximally, we squint our eyes, we need very little light to see things clearly. As a result, very little light or UV radiation enters our eyes especially if we are wearing sunglasses. If by chance our eyes fall directly on the sun, the immediate neural reaction is to close our eyes and turn away. So, during normal non-eclipsed sun, our normal physiological reflexes and reactions protect our eyes. There is just enough light to see well, very little UV rays get in to cause damage to the retina. On the other hand, during a complete eclipse, UV rays decrease very little. It gets dark, our pupils dilate, we don’t squint. The darker it is, the more our pupils dilate. During the eclipse if we look at the sun, there is no natural reflex or reaction to turn away and hence, the tendency would be to keep staring at the eclipse. As a result, more UV rays will get into our eyes if we do not take extra precautions such as wearing specially certified solar-eclipse glasses. The worst time to look at the eclipse is just after the sun is completely covered; the sun is just appearing while your pupils are maximally dilated. As a result a large amount of UV radiation can get onto the retina. It is due to the lack of physiological defences during the eclipse that the media have to remind us to take precautions.

Our cameras and telescopes will need longer exposure during a solar eclipse; longer exposure means more UV rays which will damage the sensors. Specialised films or filters are available for viewing or photographing the eclipse. Such filters fit over the front end (where the light enters) of the telescope or lens and permit just a tiny fraction of the sun’s light to pass through. It must be emphasized that when you use a filter for the camera or the telescope, you still need to wear solar eclipse glasses to protect your eyes.

Eclipse or no eclipse, the sun keeps working like any other time. During a solar eclipse... the sun is not affected
glasses for protecting your retinas; the light radiation is sharply focussed and intense when it arrives at your eyes.

Myths Associated With Solar Eclipses
Since the dawn of human history, solar eclipses have been mentioned and many myths have grown around them. These effects are not causal, there are occasional coincidental effects. Here are a few of such interesting anecdotes.

Eclipses forecast bad news. An early Assyrian record mentions an eclipse in the same passage as an insurrection in the city of Ashur (Iraq) in year 763 BC, thus connecting the two events. On August 2, 1133 a solar eclipse occurred and England’s King Henry I died shortly afterwards, prompting the notion that eclipses are bad omens for powerful people. Even for common people, an eclipse 6 months before or after your birthday prophesizes bad health.

Total solar eclipses produce harmful rays that can cause blindness. It says that a strange radiation is seen during the eclipse which damages eyes. Well, now we have better explanations as to why and how the eyes might get damaged. There is no strange radiation.

If you are pregnant, you should not watch an eclipse because it can harm your baby. This is related to the previous false idea that harmful radiations are emitted during a total solar eclipse.

Eclipses will poison any food that is prepared during the event. Again, the fear generated that some kind of radiation is produced that will harm your food. If someone’s food went bad during the eclipse, it was attributed to the eclipse.

In conclusion, eclipses are neither good nor bad for you. They are just spectacular natural events that bring people together from all walks of life to enjoy them. As long as you don’t stare at the eclipsed sun for prolonged time, and take proper precautions, you can entertain yourself and friends during this amazing occurrence using protected telescopes, protected cameras, and pin-hole projectors. The shadow of a leafed tree on a smooth flat surface exhibits lovely little projections of the eclipse.

The phone rang in the mid-morning at about 10 am, a very reasonable time for anyone to call.

“Hullo,” I said.

“Am I speaking to Bernice?” A very pleasant voice from a woman who sounded like she was in her 50s. Her voice suggests a warm-hearted, likeable person.

“Yes,” I replied.

“Bernice, this is Rita”

Before this stranger could say another word, I quickly butted in.

“I’m afraid I don’t know anyone called Rita. Please refresh my memory as to where we’d met.”

“You don’t know me, Bernice. I am from St. Paul’s Hospital Foundation,”

Again, I rudely interrupted her as alarm bells began to ring in my head. “I made a donation to St. Paul’s Foundation early in the donation season in the fall. I am afraid my budget does not allow me to make another donation to your Foundation. I am very sorry.” And I hung up.

It seems to me that charity organizations begin their annual campaigns for donations in early fall. These campaigns gather momentum as early fall melds into late fall. Somewhere in late November, the campaign organizers appear to become frantic. That may explain the deluge of paper missiles from all the charity organizations through our mailboxes! One notes the peculiar claim made by some that a donation at this point is worth three times the donated amount! Some other source would match our donation so that whatever one gives becomes triple the amount! Mysteriously, the source of this matching donation is never named!

I am astounded and annoyed to receive donation requests by phone or letter from organizations to which I have already made a donation. Occasionally when I’m in a bad mood, I want to ask them if they think I’m Elon Musk with tons of money to give or play with. Thankfully I haven’t had the chance to shout down the phone with what I’d like to say. Had that occurred, I would be saddled with immense guilt and likely atone by making the additional donation that they so want!!

Anyway, I’m emoting because I can’t quite get over how charity organizations have the nerve to come back for more donations. However, at the back of my mind, I hear my hubby, Rod, reminding me to consider their perspective. He always chants: “Theory of mind, theory of mind,” meaning have I considered what they are thinking. Against the backdrop of Rod’s chants, reluctantly I concede that charity organizers have to push to meet their own targets for desired donations. Ah well, I bow in understanding. But that doesn’t mean I’d willingly be a sucker and donate twice!!
This issue’s column is mostly about books. Since it’s still winter, what better way is there to spend indoor time? Cleaning? Nah. Eating? Maybe.

Parveen Bawa is an avid reader and has shared her preferences with us in the past. She writes with her latest recommendations:

I recently read three novels by Arturo Perez-Reverte and enjoyed all three. *The Fencing Master* is historical fiction set in Madrid at the middle of the 19th century. *The Siege* is set in Cadiz during the time of Napoleon; it’s a murder mystery. *The Queen of the South* is set around Gibraltar, Northern Morocco and Southern Spain, and is about the lives of drug cartels in modern times. The print quality of the paperbacks is not great, I was told to borrow hardcover versions from the library. *The Siege* available on loan from McGill library was easier to read.

Marilyn Bowman gave us two SFURA Seminars about James Legge, the Scots scholar and missionary who lived in Hong Kong in the mid 1800s and translated Chinese Classics. Her book *James Legge and the Chinese Classics* is listed in our Books by Retirees section at [https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/Books_By_Retirees/James_Legge_and_the_Chinese_Classics.html](https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/Books_By_Retirees/James_Legge_and_the_Chinese_Classics.html).

Now she and her book live on through YouTube. Marilyn sent us this email on November 29, 2023:

**Dear friends in SFURA**

A rather wild interview of mine regarding James Legge. This British scholar of Chinese literature, James Blount, is very interested in James Legge and discovered my book which he loved. He tracked me down and asked to interview me and record it; we did two hours, two sessions. He has now edited it into one interview and has mounted it on YouTube and sent it to me - fairly hilarious – I look quasi-insane at times, but enthusiastic.

[https://youtu.be/9MFJwaaBdjs](https://youtu.be/9MFJwaaBdjs)

The video is PUBLIC now.

Enjoy

Marilyn

Congratulations to Ehor Boyanowsky for the recent publication of his books, *Crime and Criminality: Social, Psychological and Neurobiological Explanations* in 2020 and *Blood Moon Over Rat Lake* in 2022. He had a successful Book Launch tour in the spring for his novel *Blood Moon*. His most recent book is one of collected poems, *Living with the Creatures of Light and Darkness*. They have been listed on our website in the Books by SFURA section at [https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/Books_By_Retirees.html?q=Boyanowsky](https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/Books_By_Retirees.html?q=Boyanowsky). They join a 2010 book of his, *Savage Gods, Silver Ghosts: In The Wild* with Ted Hughes on the website. Ehor retired from the SFU School of Criminology after 40 years of teaching along with his service to the SFUFA through 55+ years of SFU and BC environmental education history.

Former VP Academic and Provost, now SFURA member and Bicyclist John Waterhouse has written a book about his cycling adventures. His book *Cycling’s Ten Life Lessons* was published in 2023. The SFURA is the publisher of the eBook version. John will also enter the title with the CIP at Library and Archives Canada and deposit the book in PDF format in the SFU Library Summit Open Access collections. See: [https://www.sfu.ca/content/sfu/retirees/Books_By_Retirees/CyclingLessons.html](https://www.sfu.ca/content/sfu/retirees/Books_By_Retirees/CyclingLessons.html)

Rick McGrath had an exciting time in November at a book launch in London, UK for *Reports from the Deep End*, a book of 31 short stories he co-edited, one of which was his. He and ten more of the book’s famous UK writers signed the books at the Forbidden Planet Megastore.

Rick runs the Terminal Press Publishing Company; he edits, designs and produces books, two of which are listed on our website: [https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/Books_By_Retirees.html](https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/Books_By_Retirees.html)

The first is *Deep Ends: A Ballardian Anthology*, 2023, the tenth and final edition of the *Deep Ends Anthology Series*, published in June, 2023. The second, published in August 2023, is *Temple of the Two Moons*, which Rick describes as “a noir fantasy novella” by Lawrence Russell, of UVic Creative Writing fame from the 1970s to 90s. Manic plot and superb descriptions.” In 2024 Rick will be publishing a trade book of new short stories called *Unauthorized Departures*. Most of his books are available through Amazon.ca and other digital bookstores.

Congratulations to our Energizer Bunny, and most prolific author Selma Wassermann for another book; *THINKING MATTERS, A Guide to making Wiser and More Thoughtful Decisions*. This one is for all of us, not just for school teachers. It will appear in print in April. See: [https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/Books_By_Retirees.html](https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/Books_By_Retirees.html)

Last fall, Professor Emeritus Barry Truax was invited to give a lecture, seminar and in-house multi-channel concert of four of his soundscape compositions in the Department of Music at Harvard University. This term he is teaching a 12-week international webinar course on the same topic, for the third time online, with a number of studios in Canada, the US and Europe participating, along with around 30 individuals from a wide range of countries. The course will feature many 8-channel works realized by Truax and others in the Sonic Research Studio that the late R. Murray Schafer founded.

SFU continues to be widely regarded as a pioneer in the field of Acoustic Ecology and Soundscape Composition, a history that Barry has summarized in an article in the forthcoming Early Arts at SFU publication.

Our bonus Item this issue is the delightful January 1999 Newsletter: [https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/retirees/Newsletters/1999/1999_1_voll.pdf](https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/retirees/Newsletters/1999/1999_1_voll.pdf)

Sadly, among the first Executive Board members, only Janet Blanchet and Norman Swartz are still with us. ✤
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 of whom we are aware, not only those who were SFURA members. We welcome tributes to your former colleagues. We will place them with their obituaries on the website.

Doreen Badgero (January 9, 1930 - September 30, 2023) was a legal secretary and then an SFU library secretary for 20 years before retiring. She was a founding member of the SFURA and on the steering committee. See the story at: https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/history/10thAnniversary.html
Her obituary is at: https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/in-memoriam/a_g.html

Calen Gaine ( - 2023) worked in SFU Facilities Services for nearly four decades, overseeing capital building projects at the university. https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/in-memoriam/a_g.html

Patricia Graham (1954 - August 13, 2023) was an SFU Alumna. She received her BA in English Literature in 1977 and her MA in 1989. She was program administrator for the Institute for the Humanities from 1991 - 2011 where she was responsible for day-to-day operations, edited and contributed to the Institute’s publications and assisted with fundraising, finances, publicity and public events. She taught a few courses in the Department of Humanities and later worked in Graduate Liberal Studies. Her obituary, reprinted from the Newsletter of the Department of Humanities and later worked in Graduate Liberal Studies. Her obituary, reprinted from the Newsletter of the Department of Global Humanities, is at; https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/in-memoriam/a_g.html

Honoree Newcombe (May 4, 1945 - October 2, 2003) worked in administration in the Library, the Dean of Graduate Studies office and the English Department. She was active with Women’s Studies and AUCE and was the staff representative on the SFU Board of Governors for several terms. See her obituary at; https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/in-memoriam/n_s.html

Frank Manuel (May 22, 1943 - January 3, 2024) was a computer technician in the Faculty of Applied Sciences and joined the SFURA in 2002. He loved to learn and to teach, and he was an educator in China for over a decade. His stories from China were published in the June 2003 and October 2003 SFU Newsletters. See https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/newsletters.html
See his delightful obituary at; https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/in-memoriam/h_m.html

Brian Pate (February 1, 1928 - August 18, 2023) was the founding Head of the Chemistry Department and established undergraduate and graduate programs in Organic, Inorganic, Physical, Nuclear and Analytical Chemistry. When he left SFU in the early 1970’s he became Associate Director of TRIUMF and he was a pioneer in PET scanning; Positron Emission Tomography. Brian’s obituary is at; https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/in-memoriam/m/n_s.html

Rosalie Segal, (January 13, 1931 - November 12, 2023) was a special friend of Simon Fraser University. She and her husband Joseph Segal (1925-2022) contributed major gifts to Vancouver General Hospital, BC Children’s Hospital, the United Way, the Variety Club the Jewish Federation and SFU. They established The Rosalie Segal Endowment Fund for students with special needs at Simon Fraser University. When the SFU Harbour Centre campus was established they were major donors, and were honoured with their name on the magnificent Segal Room. They contributed generously to the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue. They donated the beautiful Segal Building at 500 Granville Street which became the home of the Segal Graduate School of Business in the Beedie School of Business. SFU Harbour Centre, the Wosk Centre for Dialogue and the Segal Building have all been the venues of many SFURA and SFU events. Rosalie and Joseph Segal’s obituaries are both on our website at https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/in-memoriam/a_g.html

Hal Weinberg, (1933 - January 25, 2024) was a neurophysiologist and Professor Emeritus, Biomedical Physiology & Kinesiology in the Faculty of Applied Science. He began his SFU career in 1966 in the Department of Psychology. He served on Senate and many Senate and University committees. After he reached 65 he extended his service to SFU for another 15 years as the director of the university’s Office of Research Ethics. His many awards included the Order of British Columbia in 2014, the Queen Elizabeth II Dimond Jubilee Medal in 2013, the Science Council of BC Career Achievement Award in 2005 and the NSERC Synergy Award in 2005. He was on the Down Syndrome Research foundation Board of Directors from 2000-2013 and the Pacific Orca Society Board of Directors and Scientific Director from 1966 - 2010. He and his wife Linda helped to incorporate the community of Anmore as a municipality and an independent village. He was Mayor of Anmore from 1987 - 2009 and served on many GVRD committees. His obituary is at https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/in-memoriam/t_z.html

We have been notified of the deaths of David Katz and Tony Sun. Their names have been listed on the SFURA website, but we do not have links to their obituaries. If any friends and colleagues can supply a link to either, please email it to retirees@sfu.ca.
A Chapter of Widows: Grief and Widowhood

BRIAN BURTCH

I first witnessed raw grief as a teenager in Camp Borden, Ontario. My father served in the RCAF and our family lived in military housing on the air force side. One summer morning in 1964 I was startled by screams outside our home. A neighbour was hunched over in her yard, in her nightgown, clapping her face, crying out. Mrs. Thompson, the next-door neighbour, rushed out to comfort her, joined by other housewives. Later that day, we found out that her husband had died unexpectedly. She had telephoned reception to ask about her husband who was hospitalized for a medical procedure. She was told, matter-of-factly, “He died last night.”

Sixty years later, I am learning about grief after the death of my life partner of over 34 years. Carol passed away in the North Shore Hospice in the spring of 2020, in the early weeks of the Coronavirus epidemic. Nearly five years previously, Carol experienced symptoms she feared might signal a life-threatening cancer. And sadly, she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. She was a nurse, midwife, stepmom to our daughter, Nana to three grandchildren, someone who gave the best hugs, honoured by Lions Gate Hospital and the Midwives Association of BC for her professional leadership, the love of my life. When we first dated, we had much in common: fathers who served in WWII, a closeness with our siblings, recent marital separations, a passion for music, literature and travel. We met through our respective work. Carol was working full time in nursing while lobbying for the recognition of midwives as a legitimate, self-governing health profession. I was a Ph.D student at UBC, researching the midwifery movement in Canada. Perhaps an unlikely pairing - the midwife and the criminologist - but there you have it.

I’m with Richard Anson’s take on soulmates: “The real secret was that when they looked at each other, they each thought they had the better deal.” Put simply, we became a couple who not only fell in love but, to borrow from Froom’s The Art of Loving, found a mature relationship by standing in love. With Carol’s passing, I have joined what I will call the widowhood. There are many collective nouns for a group of widows (for the sake of simplicity, I use “widows” to include widowers): a chapter, a circle, a collective, a quilling and, along with a group of tigers, an ambush. The meanings include groups that are resilient, helpful, persevering, formidable.

I will detail some lessons I am learning in widowhood, including resources that have helped me adjust to life on my own. These sources may help colleagues who have experienced or will experience profound personal loss. I know that shrouding grief is eminently personal, that despite commonalities every form of grieving is different, much like fingerprints: identical to the naked eye, but unique.

One of the first lessons was not to over rely on thinking things through. A palliative care counsellor alerted me to the limitations of grasping grief from the neck up, detaching from the confusion, shame and loneliness of profound loss. Trying to make sense out of chaos and even despair. Losing one’s life partner is profoundly emotional, even visceral. Despite hearing about anticipatory grief, her passing one hour after she was admitted to hospice was devastating. I learned firsthand about grief fog. A week later, in the Horseshoe Bay lineup to visit family in Cowichan, I couldn’t find the fob after thirty minutes of searching, minutes before the line began moving. Then, I did: inside my shaving kit, inside a suitcase, in the trunk. I had no recollection of why it was there. I held on to Carol’s cell phone for a few months as I kept misplacing my own. I learned to be extra careful while driving. And, with time, became more at ease making decisions on my own after decades of working with Carol on important matters. There were many instances of ‘the 180s,’ where even simple decisions were second-guessed. To stay home, to go out? To contact a friend, not to bother? What to eat? Even to eat?

Carol and I had wills that simplified the process of settling her estate, one of many blessings while taking on responsibilities of survivorship. I learned early on that not every task following a death needed to be handled immediately. That included dealing with Carol’s municipal and UK pensions, deciding when and how to celebrate her life given the restrictions of the Covid epidemic, and notifying people in our circle of friends. That, after I had dealt with all these immediate “musts,” I could put myself at the top of the list.

Another lesson was to learn from others, whether through discussion or through reading and webinars. Mihaly Csikszentmihali includes the flow of thoughts, including reading, as part of achieving flow in life. I revisited Gabor Mate’s work on trauma and read his magnum opus, The Myth of Normal. I was given a copy of Megan Devine’s comprehensive and moving account of the power of grief. Grief is meant to be carried, not thrown aside. She makes a compelling case that North American culture does a poor job of helping us to address our grief or that of others, cautioning against earnest efforts to blunt suffering, to seek quick-fixes for the bereaved. To witness other people’s grief instead of lecturing them or judging their decisions. I learned to handle most of the difficult comments. For example, when I eventually cancelled Carol’s cell phone plan, mentioning that it was to be cancelled since my wife had died, the agent said, “Sorry for your loss. I know she is in a better place.” Rather than lash out, I suggested that they shouldn’t say that to a complete stranger who may not share that religious outlook. I appreciated that I rarely heard that kind of unwelcome comforting from friends or family. I also learned the hard way that I can be cutting, unkind, and unfair with people close to me. That’s part of my work: to not be so triggered by outside opinions about the dos and don’ts of dying. In Widower to Widow, Fred Colby writes of the importance of having his wife die at home surrounded by loved ones, rather than in hospital. He writes about widowers’ regrets that their partners had not died in their homes. The missing part of a seemingly categorical take on the best place for dying is that some families cannot manage home-based compassionate care, perhaps by virtue of the layout of the home or demands of around-the-clock care or, in one case I know, the wife’s express wish to not die at home but in hospice.

Another frequent comment, however well meant, includes encouraging the widowed to “move on.” I’ll return to the fingerprint analogy here: everyone’s different. For some, moving on may be the best approach; for others such as myself, it’s a hollow, unhelpful piece of advice. I highlighted a passage in David Constantine’s novel, The Life-Writer, pages 231-232. Katrin, newly widowed, recalls the response of her late physician who “did not really allow the idea of getting through it, over it, over him. Why should you? she asked. Why
should you even want to? You loved him, you still love him, I don’t believe you can want to stop loving him. What you do want is to be able to live, and to do that you have to convert this killing grief into what it came from, into its equal other self, which is to say into continuing and enlivening love.” Katrin reflects, “And some days it seems to me a lie. Love in absence can’t possibly enliven you. Other days I feel it to be the only truth ...”.

I take heart knowing that Carol and I did everything possible during that cancer journey, including allopathic and alternative medicine, humour, drawing boundaries about communications from or to us, Carol’s blog for almost all of the four and a half years from the cancer diagnosis to her passing. Obviously, this level of outreach, an open book approach, is not for everyone. But it served us well. In the immediate aftermath of Carol’s death, I often thought of C.S. Lewis’ reflections on commonsensical beliefs that might, at first, offer comfort - we both felt beloved, we made a good life together after our respective separations and divorces, that we had the proverbial trip of a lifetime, Rick Steves’ The Best of Europe tour of six countries, that, along with many supporters, we did what we could to avert or fend off death. For a short while these thoughts provided some consolation, a lessening of heartache. And then, as C.S. Lewis wrote, “Then comes a sudden jab of red-hot memory and all this ‘commonsense’ vanishes like an ant in the mouth of a furnace.” Now, in the fourth year since Carol died, those commonsensical thoughts are comforting and are not so easily destroyed by loss.

In her autobiography, Jann Arden’s last chapter is about the best relationship she ever had. It’s not a lover or even her beloved mother. It’s her friends. Family and friends can offer invaluable support for the bereaved. We know that not all families offer that. Anne Lamott contends that when it comes to forgiving others, families are our post-doctoral fellowship! Some stalwart widows and widowers manage well on their own but there are times that call for delegating tasks, financial support, companionship. Several close friends offer a lifeline, an open book approach; for others such as myself, it’s a hollow, unhelpful piece of advice.

For some, moving on may be the best approach; for others such as myself, it’s a hollow, unhelpful piece of advice.

There are also material gifts that go miles. Some become keepsakes. A colleague arranged to ship a Montreal Canadiens jersey to me after Carol’s passing. The hockey jersey has a unique twist. Our surnames - Hird Burtch - are stitched in large letters on the back. The jersey has the number 2 which, for me, stands for a team of two. Colleagues in the department of Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies (GSWS) offered their sympathy and arranged for trees to be planted in Carol’s memory. A former Criminology student and TA is in regular contact a decade after our professional relationship ended. Jessica and her parents commissioned an original painting taken from a photo of us in the British Dales as Carol and I embraced in front of a dry stone fence. Friends offered artisanal soups, casseroles, craft beer, homemade muffins while Carol struggled. Even when weakened by cancer and cancer treatments, Carol managed to deliver home baked cranberry and orange muffins for the earth angels in the Lions Gate Hospital oncology department. Our nearest and dearest provided companionship, missives from Yorkshire, soups, recipes meant for me, definitely not for Carol! I was also reminded that healing can be microscopic, not immediate, and, a revelation, that as a caregiver I must learn not to take stairs empty-handed.

Carol and I held to a proactive approach: in life, things need to be fetched, not wished for. I searched out resources that offered solace along with constructive information. North Shore palliative care services provided solace through confidential counselling via Zoom. These four sessions, spread over months, helped to assuage loneliness that was complicated by provincial health orders that, for a time, strictly limited social contact to “bubbles” and forbade or restricted travel outside of our zone. It was reassuring to hear that there are no shortcuts through grief, that the adage that time heals everything is not lip service, a cant. The counsellor suggested that people who judge personal decisions such as dating are often in intact couples. In my personal experience, widowed friends and acquaintances are not as prone to such judgements, less likely to cling to the dos and don’ts for coping with widowhood. Palliative care services also offered Zoom workshops about breathing through grief. Another resource was the grief group that met weekly on the Ambleside seawalk. We had an hour-long coastal stroll, accompanied by trained volunteers, followed by an opportunity to regroup in a West Vancouver coffee shop. A family friend was in the walking group. When I spotted her at the gathering place near the marina, I wondered if her daughter or husband had died. I found out that her parents and brother passed within a year. I’ve recently kept company with a widower and a widow. The highest compliment I received from the widower was a thank you for what he called my counsel. Not a lecture from on high about shoulds, oughts, musts. Simply my company, hearing
him out, and fronting suggestions that he came to regard as counsel, not meddling.

Other sources offered insight into the toll of grief. UBC philosophy professor Edward Slingerland contributed an online talk drawn from his book, Drunk. In the Q and A session, asked about warning signals of excessive drinking, he emphasized the danger of drinking alone. For those of us who live on our own, it is easy to bypass healthy choices such as sufficient sleep, a nourishing diet, social contacts, and moderate drinking. My notary public, shuffling paperwork in her office, mentioned that another client in a similar position to me - recently widowed, in their 70s, mortgage free - considered himself a target, possibly attractive to prospective partners who see the security and material advantages of dating another’s net worth.

The death of a spouse often marks the end of conventional committed partnerships. It’s often said that widowers are three times more likely than widows to remarry or form a live-in relationship. Or, dryly, widows mourn, widowers replace. At first, it seemed that a new, committed relationship was likely. Just a matter of time and finding - and following - a romance recipe. But I saw that many friends and acquaintances, whether divorced or widowed, have interests that no longer include a partner. A case in point is an acquaintance, a divorced mother of two. Told that she was going to be a bridesmaid for two weddings in the summer, I joked that she’s next. Without a beat, she said simply, "I’m good." She is not alone.

I looked into research by Zheng Wu and colleagues on patterns of ‘repartnersing,’ as they put it. Canadian widowers are indeed more likely to partner up than widows. A decade after being widowed, however, only 7% of widows are in a new union compared with 29% of widowers. So, most of us will not find - or even want - another live-in partnership. Many are content with - not settle for - family, friends, privacy, acquaintances, pets, travel, our passions and interests. In time, living alone took hold. Adapting to solo life at home involved rethinking dating and what is lost without a loving partner. Lorna Crozier wrote a powerful memoir about her deep love for Patrick Lane and, in an earlier work, The Book of Marvels, she writes about the mouth and its pleasures: “there’s something more essential, what too often as time passes it must learn to live without: its favourite thing-the taste of another mouth.”

Personal relationships aside, I consider whether I might downsize my home, relocate to a condo in metro Vancouver, possibly move closer to the grandkids on Vancouver Island. But I’m sticking to North Vancouver where I have a deep tap root of friends, amenities, and medical resources. Australian writer Jane Mathews provides a wealth of information for singletons dealing with personal relationships, healthy cuisine, dining alone, travelling solo. She combines this practical advice with Aussie humour. Mathews likens her love life to Halley’s comet (once every 76 years), appreciates her body (“more bison than gazelle”), and admits that when her adult daughter boomerangs home (unintentional pun, I swear), “much as I love every hair on her out-till-four-in-the-morning-head” she looks forward to being happy on her own. As the years pass, I have gradually felt more at home.

As a music lover, there are times when I relish the Sondheim lyric about being “free as the birds in the trees, high above the briars...” and, after choosing to date for a time, I am no longer looking for fish at the bus stop. Through a couple of dating experiences over the past few years, I know why they call some relationships a crush and took heart through Jesse Winchester’s song about what truly makes us strong. As a determined survivor, I click with Bruce Cockburn’s lyric about kicking at the darkness until it bleeds daylight. This meant taking action on finances, family occasions, socializing, safeguarding time to myself, tending to the house and garden and all things domestic. To walk that lonesome valley, as the over century-old folk song goes. There are times when I do walk that valley on my own, times when I absolutely prefer that solo journey. Other times I have the gift of others, of all kinds of resources, ultimately buoyed by the memory of living half my life with Carol. After several years of not volunteering, I was recently appointed as a Commissioner for MONOVA, the Museum of North Vancouver and Archives.

Kicking back at grief involves drawing on the philanthropy that Carol and I prized. I am in close contact with representatives in SFU Advancement and Alumni Engagement and UBC’s Development and Alumni Engagement. Carol and I have legacy awards that disburse funds to SFU and UBC students. I was committed to giving back to SFU and to launching an annual award in Carol’s memory in support of midwifery students. Terms of reference for the UBC award provide for an annual gift for a student in the Bachelor of Midwifery Program who show "an interest in practicing in underserved communities. Preference will be given to candidates who are (1) First Nations, Inuit, or Métis students of Canada or (2) from underserved communities. Financial need may be considered." To date, over 100 people have donated to this award which was first disbursed in 2023, shortly after Carol’s passing. I believe that this is in the spirit set out by Professor Curzon. In the previous edition of Simon Says he outlined the impact of a bursary - The Mona and Albert Curzon Bursary - given to SFU Physics students for decades.

As I write this account in my study, the day continues to take form. Celebrating a friend’s birthday and another friend’s reappearance at coffee after breaking eight (yes, eight) ribs. Arranging for flights to celebrate a family wedding in the Kingston area this summer. Reserving a table for one on February 14th, an evening of live blues by a trio at The Admiral Pub in North Burnaby. I try to practice what I call defensive living - akin to defensive driving - securing one or both hands to the stair rails, wearing an Apple Watch to register if I take a fall, texting friends every morning to let them know I am alive and well. Finding the value of solitude spliced with friendships. I am approaching my 20th year of co-ed, slo-pitch ball on the North Shore, enthused by that competitive team sport and its camaraderie. As a late in life grandparent, Papa to my daughter, Papi to three grandchildren, there’s the reward of being a long-distance grandparent who visits family several times a year. Finally, there’s power in joining the ambush of widows, the chapter of bereaved friends. Those who may be familiar with the
overwhelming sorrow of my neighbour in Canadian Forces Base Borden or the torment of Jonathan Santlofer, who encountered what he calls the worst sound he has ever heard: his daughter screaming after her mother died unexpectedly in hospital. In closing, the grief remains even as loneliness and confusion lessen. I aim to follow Voltaire’s maxim for a good life: a busy solitude. Yes, I’m good.

Resources


Carol Hird Memorial Award in Midwifery. https://give.ubc.ca/memorial/carol-hird/


Sondheim, Stephen (1990) "Live Alone and Like It.” *Rilting Music.*


Editor’s Notes

MARCI TOMS

Just when many of us thought “things can’t get any worse internationally,” they did. I’m not going to dwell on the events in North America, South America, Eastern Europe or the Middle East in this editorial except to note that I’ve found a certain comfort and peace of mind by donating to reliable humanitarian organizations such as Medicine Sans Frontier and the UNHCR and volunteering in my immediate neighbourhood.

It’s demonstrably true that filling a bucket with water starts with tiny drops and that’s the way I look at me in my neighbourhood. I serve on the Frog Hollow Multicultural Seniors Advisory Committee (MSAC) with a group of activist seniors whose roots in the community run deep. We work on improving public transit, on connecting with isolated neighbours and on sharing knowledge and skills from dancing to chess to cooking.

As well, I’m back leading a new, afternoon English Conversation Club at Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House, one of my favourite pursuits. That alone gives me a window on the world and a strong sense of the urgency about safety - personal and political - many newcomers to Canada feel. Currently, the majority of participants are young women (under 40), very recent immigrants from Iran. They are not shy: eager, glad to be here and happy to initiate discussions about the homeland they have left. In an introductory small group discussion last week, one woman said: “You know about Iran? Have you heard… Woman, Life…” “Freedom,” I chimed in. It’s a phrase she assured me she could not say aloud in her hometown of Tehran.

In past classes I’ve come to know immigrants, including many refugees, from Syria (among them Kurds), Sudan and Eritrea, Egypt, Turkey and India, and more recently, many from Mexico, Chile and Ecuador. I’ve learned more than I’ve taught. And I come away with a sense of optimism that doom scrolling on social media will never bring.

A sense of optimism also weaves through this latest issue of Simon Says, along with provocative pieces that demand attention: compassion, the imperative to speak up and be seen, a unique perspective on critical issues of the day, reflections on personal tragedy. We are happy to welcome three new contributors, Ehor Boyanowsky, Brian Burtch and John Waterhouse. Regular contributors are back, with Meguido Zola delighting as usual in a story from Africa that features a blue bow tie, Sheila Delany writing about the symbolism of an article of clothing and Tom O’Shea, currently suffering by a pool in Mexico, extolling the virtues of a film club. Ron Long is back on his bike and snapping evocative photos. Parveen Bawa gives important advice about eclipse watching. The unstoppable Ezzat Fattah writes our feature piece about differential empathy. And, there’s more.

This is a particularly robust issue, but we are again without a book review, Sandra Djwa being immersed in her memoirs. We trust she will return for the next issue, and if she does, we will still have room for another reviewer, so step up if the urge takes you. It occasionally takes me, as it did two weeks ago when I finished a treasure of a thrift store find: The Philby Conspiracy, published in 1968 when all the principals save Guy Burgess - who died in 1963 - were still living, before ‘Tony’ Blunt was finally outed as the 4th man, when the Cold War, albeit warming, was still rather cool and Kim was alive, drinking and living in a flat in Moscow, near KGB central. It’s an erudite, literate, funny, page-turner by three Sunday Times reporters who have no need for footnotes, index or bibliography. It’s about spies, after all. Everyone knows the old adage: “It’s not what you know, but who you know.” This truth let Philby evade the hook completely. After all, he couldn’t possibly have been a spy: “He was a member of the Athenaeum.”

We hope you enjoy the issue. If you find yourself in need of further inspiration, I recommend a trip to a good thrift store. You won’t regret it.

As we go to press, we have learned that former 1970s SFU student and well-known BC poet, editor and novelist, Brian Brett passed away on January 17th. He overcame personal health challenges and was known not only as a writer but also as an enthusiastic Saltspring Island farmer and an environmentalist. He was a past president of the Writers’ Union of Canada. On campus, he was larger than life. ✤