

# UVIC TORCH

A photograph of two men in a park-like setting. One man is sitting on a concrete ledge, wearing a black t-shirt and a black cap, holding a red skateboard with a skull graphic. The other man is standing next to him, wearing a black long-sleeved shirt, a blue cap, and black pants, holding a green skateboard with a yellow geometric pattern. They are both smiling. The background shows trees with yellowing leaves, suggesting autumn.

Roll into the [Good Work](#) issue, celebrating UVic grads who bring joy and purpose to their work while building a better world, like the duo behind Landyachtz skateboards and bikes.

## Rain Men

The UVic Vikes men's rugby team battled the elements and the University of British Columbia Thunderbirds on a game day in October at Wallace Field. Second-year player **MORGAN DI NARDO**, seen airborne, didn't let the rain dampen his effort.

Credit: APShutter.com





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# Goodwill Dog

Humanities graduate and UVic employee **Rob Johns, BA '91**, took a special goodwill trip to Ukraine over the summer with therapy dog, Tango, to bear witness to the devastation of war.

BY JENNY MANZER, BA '97



Tango in the old town of Lviv.

**R**ob Johns has noticed over the years that even a brief interaction with an animal can bring a moment of joy, distraction and peace to emergency workers. Johns, who serves as UVic's manager of emergency planning, owns Tango, an eight-year-old German Shorthaired Pointer with a friendly and calm disposition.

The UVic grad was moved by the hardships experienced by the people of Ukraine as the war with Russia grinds on. He decided to take Tango on a goodwill mission. Getting the dog approved to visit the country was complicated, requiring pre-planning, bloodwork and vaccinations. Now, Tango has his very own pet passport issued from Ukraine.

The duo travelled in Ukraine over 11 days, meeting people, listening to their stories and letting them interact with Tango, who often trots around Victoria wearing a "pet me" vest in a project that Johns terms "Kindness Dogs."

"In Ukraine, the people have been through so much and the physical and psychological impacts are ongoing as the war continues," says Johns. "My inspiration for travelling with Tango was simple in concept: I firmly believe that light wins over darkness and the positive actions we each take, no matter how small, make a difference in the lives of others. I wanted to learn firsthand what was happening in Ukraine and offer, in a very small way, a bit of compassion, caring and kindness."

Johns has expert training in dealing with disasters, and Tango is naturally curious about people. He senses when someone is having a bad day and gives them extra attention. In turn, Johns takes care of Tango. "I pay close attention to what he is signalling to me and anticipate when he needs to shift his activity, take a break or move along. We have built trust in each other and understand many of the ways we each communicate."

Their mission began by entering western Ukraine via Poland, starting with Lviv, which Johns describes as a remarkable and beautiful city. They then travelled by train to Kyiv, a city of about three million people, full of reminders of its rich and long history.

Tango was a popular visitor, says Johns. "It was easily apparent that people enjoyed their time with him. Some simply sat with him and petted him, while others chose to talk about their lives. I heard many stories of fear, loss and the negative consequences of war. However, I also encountered strength, resilience, resolve and a very strong sense of identity."

The trip was not easy. The two experienced the threat of drone and missile attacks and witnessed the devastation of a bombed children's hospital. At one point, Johns was walking through a field of flags in Kyiv's *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* (Independence Square) that included Canadian flags, each representing a life lost. "As I walked through these flags, I was overwhelmed by grief and began to weep. I could not reconcile this tremendous loss of life and the profound effects on loved ones, friends, co-workers and the country."

Still, Johns was never alone. On the return trip home, he acquired COVID for the first time and was ill for several days, he recalls. "Tango, true to his caring nature, did not leave my side." †

# TORCH



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# Moving Forward Together

From forging the new Faculty of Health, to shaping the nation's clean energy, the UVic community is focused on doing fulfilling work—and making a difference.

BY KEVIN HALL, PHD, PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR



“We’re leading collaborative efforts that create a positive impact and foster excitement in what the future holds.”

Many students choose their field of study and their university—or weigh the value of getting a degree at all—in search of good work. Career advancement is one of the truly great outcomes of a university education, but it shouldn't be the sole focus.

Good work isn't just about a bigger paycheque.

Whatever doors your degree has helped open, or classroom experience you've been able to apply in your career, you've almost certainly seen the other type of “good work.” The kind of fulfilling, purposeful effort that leaves us deeply satisfied with a task that's been done well, or helps make a difference in our world.

That type of work—whether marked by expertise and ingenuity, or for serving a greater good—is no accident. We strive for it. We learn from each other in order to pursue it. Across the UVic campus, we try to make the “good work” last—by shaping the learning environment to give each student experiences of striving, succeeding and making a difference.

That's a key reason we've created the UVic Faculty of Health. The new faculty will bring together students, staff and faculty to learn and conduct research in new ways, to everyone's benefit. It's already helping to break down barriers between departments on campus; and with the cooperation of the provincial government and local health authorities, we're confident we can make an even greater difference for the future of health-care in the province and beyond.

Another way we're hoping to expand access to health practitioners is by creating a health-services clinic for our region. In collaboration with the province, we're proposing to expand the number of clinical-health placements in the region—improving health care for the community in the near term and helping practitioners stay where they learn, so they can continue to practise across coastal BC for decades to come.

I encourage you to read the story in this issue about Rory Hills, a UVic student turned Rhodes Scholar whose passion for science turned to practical research that would help people. Rory's good work is taking the form of helping with the opioid crisis and planning for future pandemic threats.

Health care isn't the only example. We're also learning from local experts in climate change all across Canada in order to shape the nation's clean energy future. While UVic faculty and grad students have been at the forefront of clean-energy research for more than three decades, the people who live and work in some of Canada's smaller and more remote communities have been keeping their own tally of how the climate is changing—and what it costs them.

The federal Accelerating Community Energy Transitions (ACET) project, led by UVic researchers, is helping communities cut costs, reduce reliance on fossil fuels and create more resilient energy resource grids—all according to the needs, priorities and resources of each community.

That's a particularly big job in Canada. We must be prepared to learn. Keeping the power flowing across the nation's farms while helping Indigenous communities transition away from reliance on diesel-powered electricity is a tall order. That means listening to locals and learning from the land.

We're proud to be at the forefront of this grassroots energy work and all of the UVic community's collective, meaningful work. We're leading collaborative efforts that create a positive impact and foster excitement in what the future holds.

And on campus, we're working hard to create an environment and culture that ensures the next generation of students, of future leaders, are thinking beyond their own success. We want them to be as primed for “good work” as you are. †

# Helping Hats

UVic grad **Ben Miller** started **Wirth Hats** to honour his late friend and help fund mental-health support for those who need it.

BY ANNE MACLAURIN, BA '91, CERT '00

UVic alumnus **BEN MILLER** in a Wirth hat.



**B**en Miller is on a mission to make mental-health conversations “less big and scary.” His social enterprise, Wirth Hats, is a conversation-starter offering free counselling sessions to anyone in need.

Wirth Hats began as a tribute to Miller’s friend, Jakob Wirth, who wanted to start a hat company but died by suicide in 2014 before his dream came to fruition. “I wanted to make Jakob’s dream a reality,” says Miller. “I saw the need for people to talk, to get help.”

After a second friend, Philipp Altenburg, took his own life in 2017, Miller was consumed by thoughts of the larger epidemic of suicide and the cultural and societal stigma surrounding it. He wanted Wirth Hats to be a symbol for a conversation, a reminder for people to be more open and vulnerable.

Since 2019, the Wirth Counselling Program has provided over 6,500 hours of therapy to individuals who otherwise would not be able to afford it. “I wanted to break down the barriers of asking for help as well as the access to mental-health supports,” says Miller. All the profits from hat sales go to support the Wirth Counselling Program. In 2023, the Wirth Foundation was created to further expand the counselling program and its impact.

“Human connection, telling our story to a professional, gives us tools to support our own mental health,” says Miller, who earned a Bachelor of Science in Geography and Environmental Studies from UVic in 2010. “I wanted to offer free counselling sessions to anyone who asked for help.”

Both his friends might still be here if they had a way to talk about their mental-health challenges, Miller suggests. In over a decade, the world has changed, but now the challenge is having enough services for people who do want to talk. The Wirth Hats

team tries to fill the gap, but Miller says they are always looking for more partners who want to make a difference.

Miller says that, personally, counselling has given him the tools to talk to others about emotions and make meaningful human connections. He finds balance day-to-day through being outdoors, exercise, yoga, laughter and daily check-ins with himself. He is proud of the impact Wirth Hats is having on people and the shared conversations that bring positive action.

Miller says his time studying Social Sciences at UVic was unique and memorable, particularly since it’s where he met many lifelong friends. He is also grateful for how the university experience shaped his journey. He fondly remembers professor James Rowe, who shared his passion for social entrepreneurship, a direction Miller followed when he launched Wirth Hats.

“I am so grateful for my time at UVic,” says Miller. He recalls a quad-tandem bike trip that he took in 2010 with three UVic friends, cycling from Victoria to Halifax over two and half months across the country. “Just do random things,” advises Miller. “It will give you an experience of a lifetime.”

The success of Wirth Hats, however, has not been random. Miller and his devoted volunteers bring meaning and passion to their brand platform. Miller also completed a business minor at UVic, giving him additional tools for building a successful social enterprise.

“We launched the Wirth Artists Series with a local Indigenous artist,” says Miller. “We look for ways to connect with the community and start those difficult conversations.”

Through new hat designs, campaigns and events such as Wirthwhile Wednesday, Miller is sending a message of hope out into the world. Read more at [wirthhats.com](http://wirthhats.com) and follow @wirth-hats on Instagram. †



# Green by Design

UVic grad **Emma Fanning** co-founded **Little Fox Design** in her quest to find sustainable industry practices.

BY KATY DECOSTE, MA '22

**F**ully edible, backyard-compostable, plastic-free cutlery; alternative seafood made from fungi; and bioidentical, animal-free milk—these are just a few of the innovative, sustainable products UVic alumna Emma Fanning has highlighted through her eco-conscious brand design.

Little Fox Design, a full-service green design firm co-founded by Fanning, BA '17, and Sastun Phillips, began when Fanning freelanced as a designer while pursuing her degree in English and Professional Writing. She attended university in the years before worldwide climate marches and student protests. Still, Fanning's anxiety over the climate crisis propelled her to dive deep into research on sustainability.

Today, the award-winning company partners with clients who value transparency, science-backed sustainable practices and working collaboratively for a better future for people and the planet. "For Little Fox, green design means that we consider the types of clients we work with, the impact of materials we specify for our clients (prioritizing recycled paper, safer inks, and reduced consumption), and keeping our own carbon footprint as minimal as possible," says Fanning. They've taken on projects for brands like Opalia, a Canadian biotech company creating bioidentical milk without the use of animals, and Aqua Cultured Foods, an alternative-protein start-up that has created an alternative-seafood made out of fungi.

The team often works with brands as they go into their first major round of funding, tackling branding strategy and brand development. This includes design of colour palettes and typography and developing assets like websites, pitch decks and marketing materials.

Throughout this process, Little Fox's recommendations are based in research into forestry and paper-production practices, material lifecycles and consideration of monoculture production and overseas deforestation practices. This leads their design choices away from materials like compostable plastics, which require industrial composting facilities to break down, or bioplastics, which are created from monoculture crops that can contribute to deforestation. The result is a holistic view of sustainability on a global scale, equipping brands to continue centring sustainability even after they finish their work with Little Fox. "Even if a client cannot make the most sustainable choice due to material constraints or budget, they can at least be aware of what the sustainable upgrade options are in the future and can build it into their business plans," says Fanning.

Beyond educating clients on sustainable design choices, Little Fox offers resources to other designers looking to make ethical choices on sustainability through a Substack newsletter and an online "Green Graphic Design" course.



"I would feel it's unethical for me to be a sustainable designer but lock a lot of the research and learning I've done behind extremely expensive paywalls," says Fanning.

Her educational materials are regularly updated. Lately, the growth of generative AI has been a specific point of concern, both for its negative environmental impacts and its training on the work of other artists and designers without their consent.

"I wanted other designers to be able to find well-sourced information and frameworks in one easy place. The primary goals of the course were to provide a comprehensive, accessible guide to being a sustainable graphic designer," Fanning says. "We think that sharing this information is crucial in order to pave the way towards a better future—one where green design is just 'design' because these considerations are innate and not a specialty niche of certain designers." †



Artwork by Emma Fanning for Opalia, a Canadian biotech company creating bioidentical milk without the use of animals.

GOOD  
work!!!



From entrepreneurs who believe life is better on a **skateboard** or a bike, to an Inuk activist who was part of a star **law class**, to a business grad who found his fit in **waterproof shoes**, to a social-work alum who is inspiring **Indigenous youth**—we profile UVic grads and those in the UVic community who bring **joy and purpose** to their work while building a better world.

# Joy Rides

After 28 years in business together, Landyachtz founders and UVic grads **Mike Perreten** and **Tom Edstrand** are still on a roll, producing planet-friendly world-renowned skateboards.

BY MICHAEL KISSINGER, BED '94 • PHOTO BY JIMMY JEONG



**MIKE PERRETEN** and **TOM EDSTRAND** started making the first run of Landyachtz skateboards in a Whistler ski cabin. Now they work out of a refurbished warehouse in Vancouver's Strathcona neighbourhood.



It was 1986. Vancouver and its mostly condo-free shores were hosting the World Exposition on Transportation and Communication, known as Expo 86, and along with it the Transworld Skateboarding Championship. It was a sea of tube socks, slip-on Vans and Vision Streetwear t-shirts as far as the eye could see. Teenage skateboard legends-in-the-making Tony Hawk, Christian Hosoi and Rodney Mullen, to name a few, were all there to compete. Thousands of spectators hung on their every ollie, kickflip and rail slide. Gravity-defying tricks were landed, minds blown, DNAs altered—including that of a young kid named Tom Edstrand.

Edstrand and some of his elementary school friends formed a skateboard gang to roll around their hilly West Vancouver neighbourhood. Mike Perreten was among them, and he bought a used skateboard from Edstrand—a rad Skull Skates deck with Gullwing trucks and Kryptonics wheels—a huge upgrade from the clunky Dominion Firefly he picked up from Canadian Tire.

Eventually, the two drifted apart, attending separate high schools. Edstrand got into art and ice hockey, while Perreten barrelled headfirst into downhill ski-racing with hopes of making the Olympics. After graduating high school, Perreten moved to Whistler and spent the next two years racing full time. He considered heading to the US on a ski scholarship but visited some buddies at UVic and was immediately smitten with the campus.

“I was basically living the life of a ski bum with no idea of the real world, so I decided ‘let’s forget skiing and have a change of life,’” recalls Perreten. He enrolled in Geography at UVic, bringing along a skateboard he fashioned from a piece of plywood he picked up while framing houses that summer in Whistler. It was not your typical skateboard. It was longer and more aerodynamic. Plus, it had big soft wheels for more stability and a smoother ride.

“I went from skiing 200 days a year to being a student—I felt I was missing something. But with this board I can go from home to class, and it feels like a ski run.”

### AN OLD FRIEND BECOMES BUSINESS PARTNER

One day while riding to class, Perreten bumped into his old friend, Edstrand, who was working on an Economics degree with a minor in Commerce. Edstrand also played on UVic’s Ultimate Frisbee team and had just returned from a tournament in California where he noticed a new skateboard phenomenon: longboards, similar to the one Perreten was riding. Rather than pulling off intricate tricks, people were using these new stretched-out skateboards for cruising along the sidewalks and boardwalks of Santa Barbara and Santa Cruz.

Edstrand told Perreten he wanted to make a board like his. As luck would have it, Edstrand’s rental in Cadboro Bay had

enough basement space for a workshop. With Perreten’s mechanical knowhow and Edstrand’s artistic and graphic design skills, the duo began pressing longboards out of plywood, using wide trucks and cushy skateboard wheels from the 1980s that were no longer in demand. The students began making boards for their UVic friends, starting up their own skateboard gang again. And like their old West Vancouver days, they used the boards to bomb down the hills of Victoria. They even took turns carving the hills in the affluent Uplands community. “It was just like having a ski hill,” Edstrand recalls. “We were always respectful [to the residents]. We would wave and control our speed and be friendly. We received more looks of shock than disapproval at that point.”

The skateboards were a hit, and the friends realized they might be onto something. For an Entrepreneurship class project, Edstrand drafted a mock business plan for a skateboard company that would become the template for their future business endeavours. “We got a good mark on it, but the prof said, ‘Oh, this is probably not a great business because the margins are not very good.’ Mike and I were young and ambitious and didn’t really care. We went for it anyway.”

The pair got to work over the summer, quitting their jobs and turning a ski cabin into a temporary workshop. They worked long days, designing and fabricating the first run of skateboards for retail. They also settled on a name: Landyachtz, a term intended to denote high-end quality. Since companies in California already made similar style boards but with cheaper labour costs and price tags, they figured the best way to stand out from the competition was to focus on quality over quantity. Their first slogan was “slightly more expensive, way better.”

### CELEBRITIES GET ON BOARD

The focus on quality paid off. Over the next few years Landyachtz gained momentum. Their reputation grew along with its foothold in the international market, earning fans such as the late actor/comedian Robin Williams, who purchased several Landyachtz boards from Purple Skunk, a San Francisco skateboard shop. Along the way, Landyachtz moved from various basement workshops and garden sheds in Victoria, to a parents’ garage in West Vancouver, to a space subleased from a North Van snowboard company, to their current digs in a refurbished warehouse in East Vancouver’s Strathcona neighbourhood.

Landyachtz continued to innovate with their skateboard designs, developing signature trucks and wheels and branching into different styles of skateboarding. Landyachtz also established itself as a force of nature in the competitive downhill skateboarding circuit, sponsoring races and riders around the globe. In 2005, Edstrand even won the International Gravity

Sports Association longboarding world championship. But the entrepreneurs discovered that Landyachtz's growing customer base wasn't just downhill thrill seekers with a need for speed.

"[What surprised me] was how many dads got on board," Edstrand says. "We would get a lot of people saying, 'I used to skate, and I want something that's easier to roll around on when I skate with my kid.' So, that's why they got a longboard. The thing with longboards and cruisers... is they appeal to a broad spectrum of skill levels. We'll have people anywhere from six years old to 60 years old because it's not as impactful as regular skateboarding."

Landyachtz's profile continued to grow through the racing circuit, trade shows and a loyal and vocal following—both in terms of feet on the ground and online presence. (Landyachtz's YouTube channel currently has 244k subscribers, with many of its videos garnering millions of views each). At its peak, Landyachtz boards were sold in more than 500 stores in the US and available in more than 50 countries.

### PROMOTING HUMAN-POWERED TRANSPORTATION

Not wanting to be limited to skateboards, in 2016 Landyachtz ventured into the world of bike manufacturing. It was a natural progression, says Perreten. "One of the reasons we got into making skateboards was that it seemed like such a great way to get around. It's so efficient, there's no motor, it just human-powered transportation... and it's the same with bicycles. Especially if you're commuting, it's one thing you can do where you feel like you're making a positive difference on the planet."

Their approach to designing bikes isn't that different from how they make skateboards. It started with a drive to make a nice commuter bike, Perreten says. "So, we designed a bike that was very simple, with good components—kind of the ultimate bike for a short commute."

Once their line of commuter bikes was launched, other designs followed—road bikes, gravel bikes and custom builds—all with the shared goal of exploring the environment while having a positive impact on the planet.

Today, Landyachtz employs approximately 35 people at its Vancouver and LA warehouses. The friends estimate they've sold at least a million skateboards over the years. The sheer number of trees used on their products—in particular maple—is not lost on them. "Mike and I are very not wasteful—frugal, even," Edstrand says. "Both of us were raised that way. So, there was always a consciousness of the Earth's resources and making the world a better place."

Landyachtz teamed up with the organizations Eden Projects, Tree Canada and Priceless Farms, which focus on planting trees and sustainable forestry practices, to establish a "One Board

One Tree" campaign. For every skateboard they sell, the company plants a tree.

"Once we dove into it a little more, it became really interesting because you get about 60 skateboards out of a maple tree," Edstrand says. "So, it's not just sustaining but this program is increasing the number of trees."

### BALANCING ACT

Like any long-running business, Landyachtz has experienced its share of setbacks—the upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 arguably the biggest one. But throughout it all, they've kept on rolling—both in terms of the business and their unique partnership.

"I spend almost as much time with Mike as I do my wife," Edstrand says. "So I think part of what's interesting is how we have been able to work together and figure out our roles, business wise, but also support each other... It's a different style of business. We've been able to complement each other and support each other and help each other grow. It's about balance."

Perreten suggests their differences are actually a strength. "We are quite different in a lot of ways, and we therefore gravitate to separate aspects of the business [and] this helps us not overlap roles too much... We solve problems from different perspectives, so some issues that are really challenging for me are easy for Tom and vice versa. Maybe one of the secrets to the success of our business relationship is because we trust each other."

Trust, balance, self-expression, creatively navigating the twists and turns of the landscape—the metaphors of riding a skateboard are hard to avoid when telling the story of Landyachtz.

For its founders, skateboarding remains not just a business but a way of life. The two still ride regularly, whether it's to blow off steam during a busy workday or burning around the neighbourhood with a family dog in tow.

"It's a very simple thrill," Edstrand says. "It feels free. You wash away all your worries. It's like when I play hockey, I'm just chasing a little piece of rubber around trying to put it in a net and I'm not really thinking about other aspects [of life] because you can't. Any day that I ride my board or bike is a better day because of it... [And] when you see someone try skateboarding for the first time they light up. It introduces them to a new world that has a positive impact on their lives. That's why we do it."

"It feels so good skating down the street," Perreten adds. "My dog will sometimes pull me on his leash. I'm carving back and forth... and I have this feeling like, man, it never gets old. It's such an awesome feeling." †

# Bringing Law School to the North

Twenty years later, graduates of UVic Law's Akitsiraq program are key players in the Inuit legal landscape.

BY KATIE MCGROARTY



**A**aju Peter had a big decision to make. She had intended to sign her son up for an innovative new program connected to the University of Victoria that promised to keep law students in Nunavut, instead of heading south. But it turned out that he was not eligible.

Peter was born to an Inuit family in Arkisserniaq, Greenland and married an Inuk from Canada. In the early 2000s, she was already an accomplished clothing designer and multi-lingual translator. She made a bold move that would change her future path.

"I had originally gone to enrol my son in the program, but I was told that at 18 he was too young to be considered," says Peter. "I didn't even know that I was interested in law at the time, but because they dared to tell me that he was too young I thought—'Well, I'll do this myself.'"

The Akitsiraq law program accepted its first cohort of students in 2001, including Peter. The program was named after a place on the northwestern tip of Baffin Island where for generations traditional Inuit "courts" met to address conflicts in their community. In Inuktitut, Akitsiraq also means "to fight back." Now, 20 years since the class convoked, the program's graduates continue to fight back—persevering against historical underrepresentation and systemic barriers.

## NEW TERRITORY NEEDED LAWYERS

The formation of Nunavut in 1999 created a new territory governed by Inuit. This historic event was the result of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, which aimed to address long-standing issues of land ownership, self-governance and cultural preservation for Inuit. However, with the establishment of Nunavut came the realization that the territory faced a critical shortage of Inuit legal professionals.

"The land-claim agreement committed to something called representative Inuit employment, which meant not only should Inuit be in the government workforce in numbers proportional to their representation in the population, but they should be in every level of leadership in the territory," says Kelly Gallagher-Mackay, who was the Northern Director of the Akitsiraq Program in 2001.

Gallagher-Mackay worked with several Inuit who were involved in the justice system, and with local lawyers and judges to create the Akitsiraq Law Society. The group advocated with different levels of government to forge a program that would allow Inuit students to earn a law degree from UVic within their home territory. The resulting program was a partnership between UVic, the Akitsiraq Law School Society and Nunavut Arctic College.

In 2001, Nunavut had about 25,000 residents. More than 60 Inuit applied to be part of the first cohort, and 13 were accepted.

“Students were in this kind of fishbowl as the first group to have the opportunity to earn a law degree in Iqaluit. Law school is challenging enough for any first-year student, but these students were under pressure and scrutiny from those who weren’t confident the program would be successful,” says Kim Hart, then Southern Director of Akitsiraq.

As few, if any, applicants had an undergraduate degree or had taken the Law School Admission Test—a requirement to being admitted to UVic Law—applicants were evaluated on previous experience and capacity to take on the rigour of the curriculum.

The Akitsiraq Law Program was designed to ease challenges faced by Inuit students who pursued legal education in southern Canada. Many of these students struggled with isolation, financial difficulties and cultural dislocation, leading to high dropout rates. By offering a law program within Nunavut, the Akitsiraq initiative provided students with the support and resources needed.

### BLENDING INUIT AND CANADIAN LAW

Hamar Foster, who taught criminal procedure to the Akitsiraq cohort, faced the challenge of designing courses that conveyed Canadian law while being relevant to Nunavut. Unlike UVic courses that reference southern cases, the Akitsiraq curriculum used Nunavut legal cases to illustrate Canadian principles, often incorporating anthropological oral history to provide local context.

“We often naturally stress what a great program it was for the students, but it’s also true that it was a magnificent experience for those of us who volunteered to go and teach,” recalls Foster, a UVic professor emeritus of law.

Former UVic law professor John Borrows was excited to be a part of a school that could ensure Inuit students receive an education in their own territories.

Courses were designed to ensure the same standards as the southern curriculum. At the same time, Inuit knowledge, Inuit traditional law and ways of knowing and being needed to be integrated.

Borrows, who is a member of the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation in Ontario, taught a class dealing with trans-systemic contract law. He notes how the students’ own experiences enriched the curriculum, creating an environment that fostered discussions about the intersection of Canadian and Inuit law.

“It was wonderful how they took charge of their own education. Many of them were Inuktitut first speakers, so they would

often ask for clarifications and talk amongst themselves about what it was that I was teaching. They really were active learners in that space,” says Borrows.

### CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME

Many students were juggling family and community responsibilities or had significant financial challenges in addition to the demanding course load of a four-year law degree. For Kim Hart, ensuring that students who needed support were able to access it was a crucial way of increasing their likelihood of success.

“If you don’t have support, or if you need to focus on things like paying your rent or putting food on the table—you just aren’t going to be able to focus on learning,” she says.

For Aaju Peter, these challenges came to a head in her second year. “I had to go to Kim Hart and say, look, I can’t continue this. I’ve sold everything I have, and I can’t afford to go to school anymore,” says Peter. “But UVic wouldn’t let me quit because of that. They found funding for me so that I could continue the program—and for that I have always been very grateful.”

Financial support was important to the success of the cohort, but so was reaffirming the role of Inuit culture in the continuing work of the students as lawyers. For Peter, having an Inuit elder who specializes in Inuit traditional law was a crucial part of her learning.

For the final two years of the program, Lucien Ukaliannuk, a respected elder familiar with community justice, human rights and legal terminology issues, was invited to be the program’s Elder-in-Residence on a part-time basis.

“Lucien brought traditional values, perspectives and Inuktitut into the classroom, but... was also there as a sounding board. The students had someone with whom they could talk, with whom they could vent, and I think that was absolutely critical to retaining the students in the program and to their ultimate success,” says Hart.

### THE CONTINUING INFLUENCE OF AKITSIRAQ

The program was a big success. In 2005, 11 students graduated with a fully-accredited law degree in a convocation ceremony held in Iqaluit.

“UVic very much was a place that taught a lot of us that you could think outside the box, that you could use the tools of law to change the system—Akitsiraq is a prime example of that,” says Gallagher-Mackay, Northern Director.

“For me, Akitsiraq is so close to my heart. It feels like the most meaningful accomplishment in my professional life. It was an amazing program, and the people who initiated it, taught,

participated and supported it in so many ways were incredible to work with,” says Hart. “The students were just so accomplished and determined. I feel connected to each and every one of them. The program’s success was important, not only for its graduates, but for the Faculty of Law and for the territory. It has had such a lasting impact and legacy.”

“Before I got my law degree, I was not as respected by the western system that values positions like doctors, lawyers and professors. Once I got my titles, such as Aaju Peter, lawyer and Aaju Peter, Order of Canada, the system that values these titles started to value my words and my presence, even though I was still just a mother of five speaking on Inuit language, cultural and hunting rights,” reflects Peter.

The success of the Akitsiraq Law Program greatly influenced how UVic Law has integrated Indigenous legal education into its curriculum and program offerings. In 2018, UVic launched the world’s first joint degree program in Canadian Common Law and Indigenous Legal Orders.

“As we developed that program, one of the sparks of inspiration was the Akitsiraq program because it was an example of teaching Inuit law alongside Canadian law. We thought it would be wonderful if there was a degree that more generally put Indigenous legal traditions into conversations with Canadian legal traditions,” says Borrows. †

## Where are they now? The 2005 Akitsiraq graduates

### LILLIAN AGLUKARK

Prior to being accepted into the Akitsiraq program, Aglukark worked for Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., as well as other Inuit organizations. In 2009, she joined Ahlstrom Wright Oliver and Cooper in Edmonton as the only Inuk representing residential school Survivors through their claim-arbitration hearings, conducting hearings in Inuktitut. She was called to the Northwest Territories bar in 2008 and to the Nunavut bar in 2009. Aglukark served as part of the Commission’s legal council on the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) and conducted hearings in Inuktitut along with fellow Akitsiraq graduate Qajaq Robinson. She is a board member of Pauktuutit, a non-profit representing Inuit women in Canada.

### SIOBHAN ARNATSIAQ-MURPHY

Arnatsiaq-Murphy worked for the Nunavut Department of Justice as a policy analyst before studying law in the Akitsiraq program. Post-graduation, she articulated with Nunavut’s Department of Justice. In addition to practising law,

Arnatsiaq-Murphy has performed traditional Inuit drum dance and worked as a choreographer for over 20 years.

### HENRY COMAN

Coman spent eight years as an RCMP officer in the North before the Akitsiraq program. After graduation, he articulated with Justice Canada in Iqaluit before being called to the bar in 2009. In 2007, following a year of articling, Coman was deployed in Afghanistan where he was part of a team training the Afghan National Police Force. Coman retired from the RCMP in 2018 and has worked within the Government of Nunavut as deputy director of Corrections, director of Civil Forfeiture, associate deputy minister for the COVID-19 Secretariat and more. He is currently an associate deputy minister at the Devolution Secretariat, which is part of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs.

### SUSAN ENUARAQ

Before studying law, Enuaraq was a former assistant director of community justice for the Nunavut Department of

Justice. After graduation, she articulated with Justice Canada in Iqaluit before being called to the Nunavut bar a year later. Enuaraq served as legal counsel with the Public Prosecution Service of Canada. In 2013, she was appointed dean of Nunavut Arctic College’s Kivalliq campus, following two years of teaching law in Iqaluit.

### KUNUK (SANDRA) INUTIQ

Before beginning the Akitsiraq program, Inutiq was a policy analyst in the government of Nunavut. After graduation, she articulated with Nunavut’s Department of Justice. In 2006, she became the first Inuk woman in Nunavut to pass the bar exam. She has worked as legal counsel for the government of Nunavut, as director of policy for the Office of the Languages Commissioner as well as serving as the Official Languages Commissioner for Nunavut. Inutiq was also the director of self-government at Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., the chief negotiator for the Qikiqtani Inuit Association for the Tallurutiup Imanga National Marine

Conservation Area's Inuit Impact and Benefit Agreement.

**CONNIE MERKOSAK**

Merkosak was a court worker in the Nunavut justice system before beginning the Akitsiraq program, and went on to article with the Maliiganik Tukisiiniakvik legal-aid clinic. She works with the Legal Services Board and as a senior court worker in Iqaluit.

**AAJU PETER**

Before studying law, Peter took Inuit studies at Nunavut Arctic College in Iqaluit. She articulated at the Ottawa law firm Nelligan, O'Brien and Payne, and was called to the bar in 2007. In 2011, Peter was inducted into the Order of Canada as a member for preserving and promoting Inuit culture and practices. Peter has been featured in several documentary films, including *Tunniit: Retracing the Lines of Inuit Tattoos* (2011), *Arctic Defenders* (2013) and *Angry Inuk* (2016) where Peter and others strive to raise awareness of the negative impact that the North American and European Union anti-seal hunt stance and sealskin bans has had on Inuit ways of life. She was profiled in *Twice Colonized* (2023) which looks at the social and cultural trauma caused by colonization and follows Peter as she attempts to establish an Indigenous forum at the European Union. Peter teaches early childhood education, teacher training, as well as teaching adult Inuit to speak their language. Starting in February, she will enrol in the Aqqusiurvik program delivered by Pirurvik, an Inuit-owned institute of Inuktitut higher learning in Iqaluit.

**SANDRA OMIK**

Before attending Akitsiraq, Omik was the former chief commissioner of the Nunavut Law Review Commission. After graduation, she articulated with Justice Canada in Iqaluit before being called to the Nunavut bar. She has worked as a Crown attorney in Iqaluit and as legal counsel to Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.

**MADELEINE REDFERN**

Redfern served as executive of Nunavut Tourism before law school graduation. After, she became the first Inuk law clerk to work for the Supreme Court of Canada. Redfern was mayor of Iqaluit, serving from 2010 to 2012 and again from 2015 to 2019. Her governance and volunteer roles include the Inuit Non-Profit Housing Corporation, Tungasuvvingat Inuit Community Centre, Wabano Aboriginal Health Centre and Inuit Head Start in



Ottawa. She has been president of Amautiit: Nunavut Inuit Women's Association, Ajungi Consulting Group, and chair of the Nunavut Legal Services Board. Redfern advised Canadian Nuclear Laboratories, co-chaired the Gordon Munk Arctic Security Program, and served on the Maliiganik Legal Aid board. She was also the executive director of the Qikiqtani Truth Commission, looking into the historical effects of past federal government policies on Eastern Arctic Inuit. In 2022,

Redfern received a UVic Distinguished Alumni Award. In 2024, Redfern was appointed interim CEO of the Native Women's Association of Canada.

**QAJAQ ROBINSON**

Prior to studying law, Robinson worked as a youth officer for young offenders and was the head coach of the Nunavut junior girls' basketball team. Following graduation, she articulated at Maliiganik Tukisiiniakvik, clerked with judges of the Nunavut Court of Justice and then became a Crown prosecutor who worked the circuit court in Nunavut. She has worked as legal counsel at the Specific Claims Tribunal and was an Associate with Borden Ladner Gervais LLP in Ottawa. Robinson was one of the five commissioners chosen for the federal inquiry into MMIWG, where she interviewed hundreds of Survivors and co-developed the findings, calls for justice and final report. She also serves as on the board of Tungasuvvingat Inuit, a not-for-profit providing cultural and wellness programs to Inuit in Ottawa, as well as the Nunavut Independent Television Network.

**NAOMI WILMAN**

Before being accepted into the Akitsiraq program, Wilman was a youth worker who developed an Inuit Cultural Program for incarcerated youth. After being called to the bar in 2009, Wilman has worked practising family law in Nunavut. She has served as director of the Quality of Life Secretariat within the Nunavut Department of Health. After obtaining her law degree, Wilman completed a BA in psychology from Queen's and Carleton universities and is currently pursuing a master's degree in counselling psychology. †

# A Shot to Save Lives

UVic grad **Rory Hills** is working on an ingenious nanoparticle vaccine that could be a game changer in protecting against coronaviruses, including ones not yet discovered.

BY MARK WITTEN



**RORY HILLS** at work in a University of Cambridge lab on “proactive vaccinology,” in which scientists build a vaccine before the disease-causing pathogen emerges.

**R**ory Hills grew up in Victoria as a curious kid who was wild about science and the natural world. Later, as a student at UVic, he became involved in a new project to test the composition of street drugs. He realized something else through that work: science can make a big difference. The project, led by chemistry professor Dennis Hore, helped set Hills on his current path.

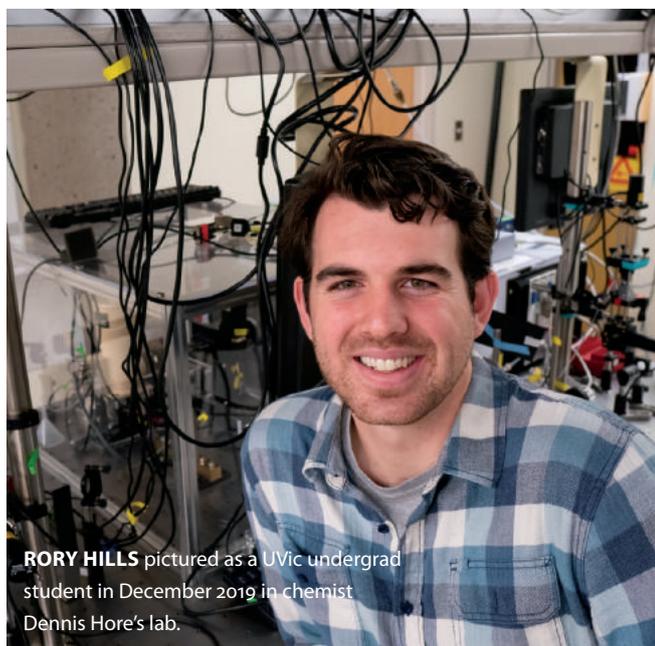
The hands-on, ground-level research experience was demanding and convinced him that doing meaningful science was his calling. “Dennis taught me what it meant to be a scientist. The work I did with him on the drug-checking project converted

my curiosity-driven interest in science into a passion for doing practical research that could actually help people,” says Hills.

He has followed that thread ever since. After earning an honours degree in biochemistry in 2020, Hills became a Rhodes Scholar. In his current work, he aims to get an edge on the next pandemic by creating a multi-purpose vaccine that could protect against viruses that haven’t even emerged yet. As first author of a recent cutting-edge study in *Nature Nanotechnology*, Hills demonstrated that a new nanoparticle vaccine with unusual properties is effective against several different coronaviruses, including viruses not represented in the vaccine.

“We’ve shown in a pre-clinical model that a relatively simple vaccine can raise an immune response to a broad range of coronaviruses, including related viruses that are still unknown and yet to be identified. Our goal is to have effective, broad-spectrum vaccines ready for Day 1 of the next pandemic threat, which could be rapidly scaled up for mass production, if needed,” says Hills, who is doing a DPhil (PhD) at University of Oxford and is a visiting student at University of Cambridge in protein biologist Mark Howarth’s lab.

Hills’ innovative research is at the forefront of a new vaccine strategy that anticipates future pandemic threats with proactive, all-in-one vaccines. “This experimental vaccine against multiple coronaviruses is a key step towards our goal of ‘proactive vaccinology,’ where vaccines are designed and readied for manufacture before a potentially pandemic virus can infect humans,” explains Hills, who uses synthetic biology and protein engineering to develop new vaccine technologies that could potentially guard against a wide range of pathogens including coronaviruses, influenza, rhinovirus, HIV and mpox.



**RORY HILLS** pictured as a UVic undergraduate student in December 2019 in chemist Dennis Hore’s lab.

## CREATIVE SCIENTIFIC THINKING TO SOLVE REAL-WORLD PROBLEMS

Even as a youth, Hills had an omnivorous appetite for science, nurtured by his empathic, nature-loving parents. “As a kid I was obsessed with food chains and the plight of endangered animals, and my parents took me to every nature program available,” he recalls. Years later, as a teenager, Hills began to see how science is connected to broader social issues and can be instrumental in understanding and solving these problems—after hearing UVic researcher and former Green Party leader Andrew Weaver talk about the impact of climate change.

As a biochemistry major at UVic in 2018, he was the first student hired and helped to launch the Substance Drug Checking pilot project, led by Prof. Hore and social work professor Bruce Wallace. The interdisciplinary project provided users of illicit street drugs with quick, accurate chemical analyses of drugs, including the main active ingredient and contaminants including trace amounts of fentanyl—to prevent opioid overdoses.

“I jumped at the opportunity to use my analytical chemistry knowledge and skills to help with the opioid crisis and do something that could save lives. My job was to analyze all the substances in street drugs and allow each person to make an informed decision about the risks,” says Hills, who knew peers who had died from drug overdoses. The project team has since expanded to more than 20 people and offers drug-checking services at six other sites on the Island.

For his undergraduate honours project, Hills pivoted back to the challenge of climate change by investigating and characterizing novel proteins from bacteria in the human gut, which could potentially be used to generate biofuels from seaweed.

The hands-on experience and knowledge gained at UVic gave him the confidence to apply for a Rhodes Scholarship at Oxford. Hills thought he’d botched the final interview, which took place in November of 2019.

“I was having a meal with my girlfriend and other friends later that day, feeling dejected. I got the good news in a call at the restaurant and getting to share that moment with them was really special,” he recalls. “Winning a Rhodes Scholarship opened this whole new world of opportunities. I wanted to do something in research that would have a big impact in helping people.”

## ENGINEERING A UNIVERSAL VACCINE WITH PROTEIN SUPERGLUE

He headed to Oxford in the fall of 2020. “I had been interested in working on cancer vaccines and then COVID happened,” says Hills, who was looking for a lab that would be the right fit. “I was attracted to Mark Howarth’s lab because of the diversity of projects, our common interest in synthetic biology and new vaccine technologies, and most importantly, he was always thinking about how the research could be clinically applied. I’d spoken with other academics who didn’t think about that.”

In Howarth’s lab, Hills led the development of an ingenious, all-in-one nanoparticle vaccine that combines a mix of key protein fragments—known as receptor-binding domains (RBDs)—located on the spike proteins of eight different sarbecoviruses (a coronavirus subgroup that includes the virus that caused the 2002-04 SARS outbreak). The vaccine contains RBDs from SARS-CoV-2 and several bat and pangolin sarbecoviruses with the potential to infect humans. “As a virus evolves, some parts of it change while other parts stay the same. Our vaccine incorporates evolutionarily related RBDs from eight coronaviruses, so that a single vaccine trains the immune system to respond to parts of the viruses that remain unchanged,” he explains. “This protects against diverse known coronaviruses and also related viruses that haven’t yet been discovered.”

Working closely with researchers in Howarth’s lab and collaborators from the University of Oxford and California Institute of Technology, Hills had the formidable task of creating a simpler version of a complex mosaic nanoparticle vaccine the group had developed earlier. “Despite its success in raising immune responses to different coronaviruses, the mosaic nanoparticle vaccine had many components and would have been difficult to produce on a large scale or validate with regulators,” says Hills, who became a visiting student at Cambridge after Howarth was appointed Sheild Professor of Pharmacology there in the fall of 2022.

Hills and his collaborators created a simpler, streamlined vaccine by genetically fusing RBDs from four different coronaviruses to form a single protein, called a quartet, and fusing four other RBDs to form a second quartet. “We use a protein superglue, called SpyTag, developed by our lab, to attach these two quartets to a protein nanocage, called SpyCatcher. The protein

nanocage is a spherical nanoparticle held together by incredibly strong interactions,” he explains. “Remarkably, with just two (Quartet Nanocage) or three (Dual Quartet Nanocage) components, our streamlined vaccine managed to produce a higher level and broader range of neutralizing antibodies against a broad range of sarbecoviruses than the nine-component, mosaic nanoparticle vaccine.”

The next step will be to test this multi-viral vaccine in humans. “We’re working with companies now to demonstrate that this vaccine can be produced on a larger scale for testing in clinical trials,” says Hills. “We’re also applying this technology to protect against other pathogens beyond coronaviruses. Our long-term goal is to develop a library of vaccines against viruses with pandemic potential before they have the opportunity to cross over into humans.”

## THINKING BIG FROM A PLACE OF HUMILITY

Hills has the boldness, brilliance and passion to think big. But he also has the humility, self-deprecating humour and work ethic needed to survive and thrive in the high-octane Oxbridge (Oxford and Cambridge) research community, where being clever is a given. “Going to Oxford was a big jump for me. My first two years I was terrified about whether I deserved to be here and felt like an imposter,” he says. “Fortunately, I was well-prepared by UVic because there is a big emphasis on lab and practical skills, and on working hard to get meaningful scientific results. The scientific peers at my level here were supportive and Mark, who has incredibly high standards, gave me a sense of confidence and certainty that I would be able to do it.”

Hills is now focusing his PhD research on using new vaccine technologies to develop more effective HIV vaccines. His West Coast roots and love of nature keep him grounded while tackling mega-health challenges as a scientist in the nanoworld.

“My experience of culture on the Island is that people seek out a balance in their lives and try not to take themselves overly seriously,” he says.

“Being on the ocean, you feel very small and see yourself as part of something much bigger. I think that feeling is important. Solving real-world problems takes a lot of people working together towards the same horizon.” †

# Sounds for Soldiers

The Music for Veterans Project, led by Fine Arts grad **Emily Armour**, allows young musicians to honour someone who served in the military with an original composition.

BY JOHN THRELFALL, BFA '96



**EMILY ARMOUR** with Pipe Major Roger McGuire of the Canadian Scottish Regiment (Princess Mary's) for an event commemorating the 80th Anniversary of D-Day held at Bay Street Armoury, June 2024.

**W**hen it comes to honouring veterans, many people wear a poppy on Nov. 11 and then literally call it a day. Piano teacher Emily Armour created the Music for Veterans Project as a cross-generational way to honour soldiers year-round. Armour's program involves sharing profiles of a member of the Canadian military with a young musician. The students then create an original musical composition to honour that person.

"It's wonderful that we all unite and honour veterans in November, but it's important to have other moments throughout the year to make them feel special as well," Armour says.

Now in its fourth year, the Music for Veterans Project (MVP) provides meaningful connections between Armour's students and Canadian veterans. Over 100 pieces have been written by students ranging in age from 18 to just five years old. These works honour both deceased and living veterans, including those who still are on active duty or have served as reservists.

"What makes this project unique is that every piece is inspired by and dedicated to an individual person," she says.

## HONOURING THE PAST

The program started as a Remembrance Day event but has since grown in scope. "There are a lot of activities out there for youth around Remembrance Day, but there isn't always an opportunity to do something focused on an individual," says Armour. "Like many of us, some of my students may have had relatives who served, but do they know a veteran who's alive? Have they ever spoken to one? Have they ever heard a veteran talk about anything—even just about themselves? Through this project, the students are suddenly realizing just how different veterans are." The program is now available to all music instructors, not just those who teach piano.

Armour received both her Bachelor's (2012) and Master's (2017) from UVic's School of Music, where she primarily studied with famed professor Bruce Vogt. Her family's strong ties to the Canadian Armed Forces inspired the project.

"Not only was my husband in the military, but my grandmother served overseas during World War II: she was a physiotherapist in England and Germany between 1944 and 1945. I've

seen how important and valuable it is for veterans and people in the Canadian Forces to have these moments of acknowledgement and positive recognition—but it’s just so amazing when it’s coming from youth.”

### PERSONAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Averaging between one and four minutes in length, each simple but evocative composition is inspired by an information package compiled by Armour. Veterans are chosen through a mix of word-of-mouth and organizational outreach. The creative lens is strictly focused on the soldier as a person: no additional historical information is added to the profile the student receives.

“There’s a lot of love, thought and care that goes into the process,” she says. “It’s emotional for everybody, because it’s so personal: even the titles of some compositions are drawn right from the material. It’s a very personal acknowledgement, as opposed to giving a drawing of a poppy to a veteran... which may be fantastic, but it lacks the personal acknowledgement music has.”

The compositions are always instrumentals with the idea of allowing the listener to conjure their own thoughts and feelings from the piece. She feels the greatest value is not actually the music itself: it’s *why* the music is written.

“As artists, it’s always kind of about us—what can this do for me and my career and my voice—but this is decidedly not about them; it’s for the person who gave their life in France during World War II, or whenever. It taps into something deeper because they’re doing it for somebody else.”

### LIFE-ALTERING EXPERIENCES

The age range of the veterans honoured reflects Canada’s involvement with international conflicts, from World War I to today’s peacekeepers. The program has honoured two living centenarians and a 35-year-old Afghanistan veteran—with a century’s worth of soldiers in-between.

Armour says it’s been a positive experience for her students. They receive a certificate signed by the veteran or partner organization and often get to professionally record the music. The veterans receive a copy of the music.

Many pieces are quietly reflective, with titles like “Beyond the Fray,” “Remembering a Hero” or “The Sacrifice for Freedom” (all of which can be heard at [musicforveteransproject.com](http://musicforveteransproject.com),

many paired with a photo of the veteran). But Armour notes one meditative piece called “Ballad for *Seanmhair*” (Gaelic for “grandmother”), which was composed this year for the 80th anniversary of D-Day.

“The title seems very strange for a commemorative piece about a soldier, but his next-of-kin was his grandmother: that was the person who would have been informed of his death. I was so proud of my student for thinking about the impact of their service. It shows how this project can help heal and unite people from such different worlds, both historically and emotionally.”

Looking to the future, Armour has now established MVP as a federal not-for-profit and is opening participation to other piano teachers; they’ve also started working on projects that are both larger and more national in scope.

“Last year we did an event at the Royal Oak Burial Park in Saanich: it was our first public event and we had a ceremony at the war graves plot featuring a procession with Vice Regal Piper Ken Wilson, a group of active Air Force members and World War II pilot George Brewster as a guest speaker,” she recalls. “My students announced the names of the fallen airmen and the title of their pieces; then, as we played professional recordings of the music, they lay the sheet music on the graves.”

Armour and four of her students were also thrilled to attend a 2023 event at the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa, where the audience included Indigenous elders, ambassadors and other dignitaries. “That was a life-altering experience,” she says about watching her students play pieces honouring three Indigenous veterans, as well as former Senator Lieutenant-General (Ret’d) Roméo Dallaire.

### THE SOUND OF HISTORY

When asked if she has a favourite moment over the last four years, Armour hesitates. “I don’t know if there could be just one, there have been so many: seeing tears in the eyes of a veteran as they listen to the music, talking to a family member about somebody who recently passed away... it all reminds me of how important this project is.”

As a veteran told Armour after hearing the piece composed for him, “You and your students have no idea how much this piece of music means to me, and I will use this gift to get me through some of the tougher days ahead.” †

# Making Change, Together

Social Work alumna **Kelly Terbasket** helped create two organizations rooted in Indigenous beliefs to help challenge biases and fight the effects of colonization.

BY STEPHANIE HARRINGTON, MFA '17



KELLY TERBASKET at Earth Sense.

## NUTURING LEADERS

In 2013, Terbasket co-founded IndigenEYEZ, a non-profit organization that offers leadership and facilitation training rooted in Indigenous ways of being, focusing on instilling empathy, relationality and creativity in participants. Terbasket, who is program director, says IndigenEYEZ programs help to nurture current and emerging leaders who can work within their communities to face the impacts of colonization.

“My vision is that we have people with tools and confidence, courage and capacity,” she says. “We want to inspire people to feel like they can make change, because they can.”

IndigenEYEZ programs include Earth Sense, created to explore land-based connection and climate justice through an Indigenous lens, 13 Moons leadership

development for Indigenous women and Two-Spirit Peoples and SPARK, a facilitation training program. Since its launch, IndigenEYEZ has held more than 200 workshops and 30 camps in Syilx-Okanagan territory and across the Lower Mainland.

## FIGHTING IMPLICIT BIAS

As her TEDX Talk continues, Terbasket shares her own story of implicit bias. She shows the audience a photo of a young girl in a buckskin dress. While audience members guess that the child looks “proud” or “happy” in the photo, Terbasket, who shares that the photo is of her, remembers the experience differently.

She says she felt mad and ashamed. “Already, at such a young age, I had internalized the dominant narrative that to be Indigenous was to be inferior. The hard part was nobody saw I had internalized that.”

It’s a profound and painful moment in the TEDX Talk. Over time, Terbasket says she learned to question the internalized racism that had distorted her views of what it means to be Indigenous. “I learned about the incredible wisdom of Indigenous Peoples,” she says.

In her TEDX Talk, Kelly Terbasket invites you to draw a tree. Audience members sketch the first tree they imagine as Terbasket waits on stage at the 2022 event. “After you’ve drawn your tree, I’d like you to notice—do you have roots on your tree?” she asks.

A couple of people in the audience raise their hands, but most do not. Terbasket says this is a common occurrence. Then she goes deeper with the metaphor. “We don’t see the roots, so we don’t think about them,” she says. “Just like the roots, implicit bias runs deep but we don’t think about it. It’s invisible to us but it has so much power.”

So begins Terbasket’s TEDX Talk, “Recognizing our Implicit Bias Towards Indigenous Peoples.” Terbasket, a Bachelor of Social Work ’88 graduate who lives on her family’s ancestral homelands on the Blind Creek Indian Reserve in Syilx territory in the Similkameen Valley, has spent three decades exploring hidden misconceptions that fragment relationships and inhibit true community building. Her life’s work is dedicated to creating practices and tools that address systemic oppression and implicit bias.

## TIME AT UVIC

Terbasket credits her time in UVic's School of Social Work with starting her journey of healing. She joined UVic at a time when there was no First Peoples House, far fewer Indigenous students and far fewer supports available. The School of Social Work hadn't yet developed the Indigenous specializations for which it is now known.

Terbasket says that, at first, she felt like she didn't belong. She did, however, have a few classmates who were Indigenous and was able to form some friendships. A couple of years into her degree, Terbasket found out about UVic's Native Students Union, which also helped her build a sense of community and belonging on campus.

In classes, she learned about residential schools, which her family never spoke about at home. Many of her community members and extended family had been forced to attend Kamloops Indian Residential School, where in 2021 the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc found what they believe to be 200 burial sites on the grounds, sparking a national movement to find the missing Indigenous children who never made it home from residential schools.

As Terbasket studied, she thought about the contrast between the experiences of her two great grandfathers, a German settler who spoke about his new homeland as the "land of milk and honey," and her Similkameen grandfather, who fought to water a small fruit orchard while his basic rights were violently taken away.

She integrated the social-work program's focus on community development into her own philosophy. Terbasket says she realized Indigenous communities have the right to heal and move forward. She decided to start with herself, undoing the negative narrative about her culture that the little girl in the buckskin dress had absorbed.

"It's been a lifelong journey of undoing those impacts and the internalized narratives. I've spent a large portion of my life decolonizing. It all started there, at UVic," she says.

Terbasket completed practicums with the Victoria Native Friendship Centre, where she met the Elder Alex Nelson, who became a mentor to her. She travelled to Alert Bay for another practicum, where she helped make a film about survivors of sexual abuse, and learned about how other Indigenous communities managed child welfare and kept communities together. She deepened her understanding of herself and her connections through culture and ceremony. "I went from shame to pride," she says.

Terbasket started to understand that her voice mattered, her culture mattered.

## FINDING HER PATH

When she graduated from UVic at the age of 21, Terbasket was hired at her old high school as a counsellor. A couple of years later, Nicola Valley College (now Nicola Valley Institute of Technology) recruited Terbasket to work there. As time went by, she ended up teaching, developing and delivering a culture camp course.

"I remember being very intrigued by experiential learning. I realized this was my thing. I loved teaching, I loved doing holistic learning," Terbasket says.

In the early 2000s, as BC's advisor for Health Canada with the HeadStart Program, Terbasket visited Indigenous communities across the country and learned firsthand just how devastating ongoing colonialism and systemic oppression can be.

She noticed that Indigenous communities often hired outsiders as consultants and facilitators. She realized these communities needed to build capacity among their own people to start the process of decolonization and Indigenization. "Not everyone can go off to university. That's where IndigeneYEZ was born," Terbasket says.

Two decades of social work had led her to the point where she could branch out. With the help of co-founder Kim Haxton, and unwavering support from an enthusiastic philanthropist, IndigeneYEZ came into being.

Since then, Terbasket has earned executive coaching certification and taken extensive training in creative facilitation through Partners for Youth Empowerment (PYE Global).

In 2020, after numerous requests from settlers for truth and reconciliation workshops, IndigeneYEZ launched kinSHIFT. The social enterprise offers workshops for non-Indigenous people who want to unlearn implicit bias and to see Indigeneity in a more accurate and truthful way. It also offers a sustainable way to fund IndigeneYEZ's work with Indigenous communities.

## STRONGER TOGETHER

In her TEDx Talk, Terbasket introduces the concept, snəqsilxw, which means family or sharing one skin. It refers to all our relations—inclusive of land, water, animals, plants, family, community, nation and children-to-be. Her main message is that we all miss out, as a society, when we don't address our internal biases and racism, when we don't value Indigenous Peoples' knowledge, lived experience and right to sovereignty and self-determination.

At the end of the TEDx Talk, Terbasket invites everyone to stand. Pretend you are a tree, she says. Imagine your roots going through your body, down through your feet into the floor. Your roots intertwine with other people's roots. "Imagine how we can be stronger together," she says. †

# Calm after Alarm

UVic Social Sciences grad and bestselling author **Dr. Russell Kennedy**, BSc '87, spent years studying anxiety and now offers his own approach to dealing with the “alarm” stored in the body after trauma, which is part of his own backstory.

BY JENNY MANZER, BA '97



RUSSELL KENNEDY takes a moment to check in with himself at a Cordova Bay beach.

**D**r. Russell Kennedy has a long list of accomplishments. He’s a physician, bestselling author, parent and podcaster—he’s even had success as a stand-up comedian. But he’s also something else: a person who has suffered from and deeply understands the tsunami of distress that anxiety can wash over a life. Once, he also was a frightened boy, who both loved and feared his mentally ill father.

Kennedy has done many brave and bold things: stepping onstage to perform his comedy, writing a book about mental health that gets personal—all while battling anxiety for most of his lifetime. His own experience with anxiety goes back to his childhood, when he was parented by a loving, but mentally ill father—whose schizophrenia and bipolar illness made the household volatile. Kennedy now believes that this experience affected him into adulthood—that the “alarm” from that trauma is stored in his body.

He has harnessed his extensive medical knowledge and his personal experience to support his own approach to anxiety and how to deal with it. This formed the basis for his first book, *Anxiety Rx: A New Prescription for*

*Anxiety Relief from the Doctor Who Created It*, which he self-published. The sales started slow and snowballed by word of mouth into a top seller, with about 90,000 copies sold.

He has since appeared on more than 250 podcasts talking about different facets of this complicated, pernicious and prevalent condition. He recently launched an updated edition of his book, this time with two major publishers and a global distribution.

## WHAT IS ANXIETY?

He connects anxiety back to trauma in the past. When a child is bullied, or is coping with an abusive or addicted parent—that produces alarm

energy that stays in the body. “Anxiety is basically your own mind’s compulsion to make sense of what feels unnatural and scary in your body,” he says. “The way I usually explain it to people is, regular anxiety is part of life. People with chronic anxiety who are suffering all the time basically had something in their childhoods that was too much to bear, and they stuffed it down into their bodies, because energy can’t be created nor destroyed only changed and formed into an entity I call alarm.” For highly sensitive people, it may take less trauma to cause this alarm.

He suggests anxiety is a collection of words and sequences the brain uses to make sense of and concretize this feeling of alarm that is sitting in the body. In his view, much of therapy fails to recognize that anxiety is not a problem of thinking, but a problem of feeling, and you have to fix it at a feeling level.

Kennedy strongly believes that anxiety is a somatic state of alarm held in the body and reflected in the mind. Worries are a way to make the uncertain seem more certain. His study of neuroscience literature suggests that during worry, our brain releases “feel good” chemicals such as dopamine, endorphins and enkephalins. This creates a vicious cycle. “When we worry, we actually create these chemicals in the brain that actually reward us. That’s why it’s so hard to stop worrying.”

Finally, worry just feeds on itself, he adds. “I haven’t seen anybody with chronic anxiety, including me, that didn’t come from a victim mentality.” He believes these key features need to be recognized if people are going to heal from anxiety instead of just learning to cope with it, comparable to stopping a leak in a ceiling instead of patching over the damage.

Kennedy was raised in Victoria and started at UVic at age 21, earning a Bachelor of Science in Psychology. “My first grades were terrible. I even failed Calculus 100, so I thought there’s no way I’m going to get into medical school with these grades.” Yet, an inner voice told him he could do it. He persevered and started getting As and A-pluses in second and third year.

“I think a lot of us worriers are like this. We are very strong, because we have to do everything everyone else does, go to the store, raise our kids, but we have to do it with 100 pounds of fear on our backs.”

“I think a lot of us worriers are like this. We are very strong, because we have to do everything everyone else does, go to the store, raise our kids, but we have to do it with 100 pounds of fear on our backs.”

During his fourth year of study at UVic, Kennedy’s father ended his own life after years of suffering from bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. Through the grief, guilt and relief over his father’s death, Kennedy still managed to graduate and went on to earn a medical degree from Western University. He served as a family doctor in Victoria and Vancouver for more than a decade—while working evenings as a standup comedian—and trying to help patients with anxiety as best he could in the brief consults the system allowed. He would sometimes see 40 patients a day.

In his view, traditional medicine is drug-driven out of necessity. He believes psychiatric drugs are a crucial part of medicine, but overprescribed. He was horribly frustrated and almost suicidal over his own mental health because traditional medical therapies were not helping him. So, he travelled to India to try to find an alternative path, eventually going on an LSD journey. That experience with psychedelics widened his perception and set him on his current course.

These days, he refers to himself as a clinical neuroscientist and sees a few patients to help them with anxiety. He devotes most of his work hours to writing about and connecting with people about anxiety, hoping to help others find relief. He does not run a research lab, but reads widely about neuroscience.

Kennedy’s updated book, *Anxiety Rx: A Revolutionary New Prescription for Anxiety Relief from the Doctor Who Created It*, was published in September of this year. The solid sales of his first edition prompted strong interest from traditional publishers, and he earned a solid six-figure advance for the updated book.

He no longer practises family medicine, which allows him time for yoga, writing, podcasts and his family, including his wife, daughter and two grandchildren, not to mention his beloved pair of dogs. Kennedy’s work contains some theories that

he recognizes may be controversial to his fellow physicians—including a belief that the profession leans too heavily on pharmacology and that Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is a limited solution.

He insists he does not wish to cause controversy with his physician peers—he supports traditional medicine for many ailments. But, in his view, CBT and medications do not get to the heart of anxiety, which he believes is the state of alarm in the body.

**OVERESTIMATING THREAT, UNDERESTIMATING AGENCY**

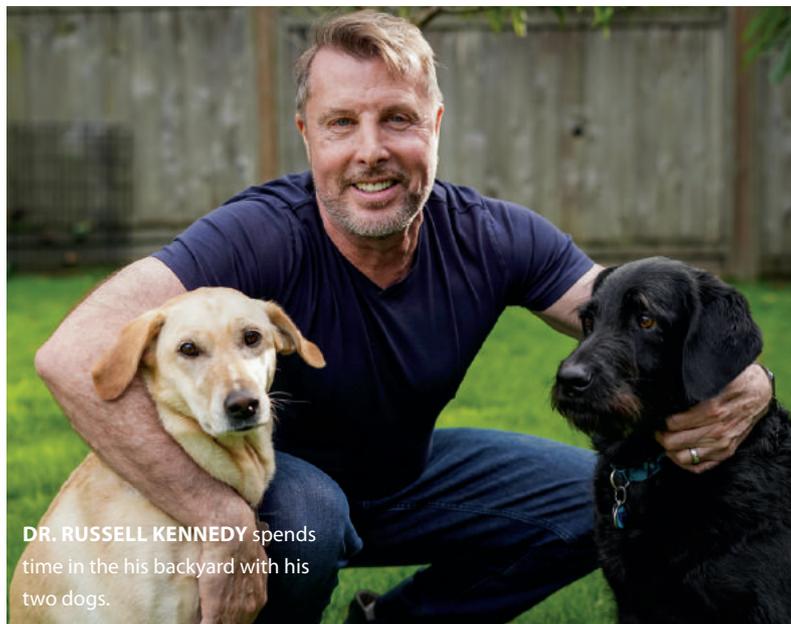
“I often say anxiety results from a mind/body disconnect. You’re living in your head, you’re not living in the present moment sensation of your body, you’re living in the constant worries in your mind,” he says.

The key is being curious and analytical about your anxiety, he says. “Oh, I wonder why I think I’m going to die of cancer, I wonder why I think I’m going to fail this exam?”

He says with one degree of separation, going into curiosity mode, you can see your worries with more clarity—and engage the rational part of your brain that the survival physiology has shut off. One of the things that anxiety does is make you overestimate threat and underestimate your ability to deal with it, he notes. If you stay in your house and worry, things never get better, but if you push yourself out of comfort zone, you start seeing “I can do this.”

The key is to stop using worrying as a coping strategy. “This is one of the things that potentiates our victim mentality and keeps us in the chronic state of ‘we can’t do it.’ But every day we’re showing ourselves that we can.”

In his current life on Vancouver Island, he has to pay attention to his own physical alarm, which manifests as a feeling in his solar plexus. His father



DR. RUSSELL KENNEDY spends time in the his backyard with his two dogs.

would go into a horrible deep, dark depression or be manic and awake for days at a stretch. Kennedy says he believes that “program,” or trauma, is still running within him like a background operating system.

These days, when he feels calm, he knows cognitively that nothing bad is going to happen to him, but sometimes his body needs more reassurance. So, he does breathwork and focuses on looking forward to enjoyable tasks that lie ahead for the day, such as appearing on a podcast, or having a gym workout.

Now in his early 60s, he is able to enjoy a more peaceful life, including outings with his grandson spent golfing and eating ice cream. Both he and his wife Cynthia are certified Somatic Experiencing Practitioners (SEPs) and they have been together 11 years. He is also a certified yoga instructor and meditation teacher, and these practices form part of his wellbeing. He hasn’t performed as a comedian recently, but he used to love appearing at Heckler’s in Victoria. He enjoys the way comedy highlights the ridiculousness of the human condition—a way to laugh together through our shared struggle. †

Dr. Kennedy has an **ABC** acronym he uses in his approach to anxiety.

**A** is awareness. Be aware of what it feels like in your body when you feel alarmed and anxious.

**B** is go deep into your body and breath, get out of your head. “You’re not going to find the solution in your head, you’re just going to find more worry.” Put your hand where you feel the alarm and get into your body.

**C** is to have a compassionate connection to the child in you who was abandoned, who was neglected, who was bullied, who had to mature too early. That’s the root cause of the alarm in the first place.

# Best in Shoe

UVic grad **Tony Yu's** Vessi footwear has taken the waterproof sneaker industry by storm.



**T**ony Yu, BA '12, doesn't have time for rainy day moping—he likes his weather wet, with a side of West Coast drizzle if possible. In 2018, the UVic Economics grad and his two business partners launched Vessi footwear, purveyors of 100 per cent waterproof knit-sneakers that are both vegan and breathable. Thanks to a successful \$1 million USD crowdfunding campaign and a pandemic-precipitated loungewear revolution, Vessi has been keeping customers comfortable and dry to the tune of close to a million pairs of shoes annually.

Although it started as an online, direct-to-consumer business, Vessi now has brick-and-mortar stores in Burnaby, Toronto and Mississauga and is dipping its toes into the world of rainproof jackets, backpacks and accessories. Vessi has also woven altruism into its successful business model: During the COVID pandemic, the company donated shoes to 2,050 nurses in Vancouver and used sales proceeds to buy and donate surgical masks to healthcare workers. Since then, they've made efforts to keep old shoes out of the landfill (or from gathering dust) and put them on the feet of those who could use them.

"One of the things we noticed is that no one really throws out their shoes, so we created a trade-in program at our stores," Yu says. "We take your old shoes on trade-in and we donate them to another country where they can repurpose the shoes... and the funds go towards education funds."

**Favourite sneakers as a kid:** "I had a pair of Kangaroos with the little zipper pouch. I thought those were cool. I would put two dollars in there or a loonie. It was like snack money."

**Favourite non-Vessi shoes he currently wears:** "My Foot Joy golf shoes. I like to play golf. I also have a pair of On running shoes."



**Number of shoes in his closet:** "I have a lot. But generally, I'll rotate between two or three—like your running shoe, your everyday sneaker and your everyday court shoe look."

**Impact of attending UVic:** "UVic had a great exchange program. I was in the Economics program and then did a year in Hong Kong... I met a lot of great people from all over the world. People from the States, people in Europe. I made more global friends and then saw the world differently through the travels."

**Other interests:** "I'm into cars and kiteboarding. I've just picked up rock climbing. I'm really into business and tech, so working with great founders and scaling things up."

**Weather-free wardrobe:** "We're really trying to be a brand that's a cross between an Arc'teryx and a Lululemon. So, your everyday leisure, but fully functional. For our product it's something like the weather-free wardrobe where on a super sunny day you can grab anything off the shelf and not worry about if it's raining in the afternoon. That's really enabled by our product technology and our design philosophy."

**Embrace the rain:** "I think the brand is much more than waterproof. Our whole goal is to inspire happiness in the rain, to make sure these miserable, wet days aren't that miserable for people anymore and give people a chance to go out and embrace the rain rather than run away from it." 🌧️

—Michael Kissinger, BEd '94

# Benny Energy

UVic grads **Paige Cey** and **Julie Letizia** poured their passion into Benny, an energy drink that promises to give you a boost without the nasty extras.

We profile enterprises run by UVic alumni.



PAIGE CEY and JULIE LETIZIA.

**Name:** Paige Cey and Julie Letizia

**UVic degrees:** Bachelor of Commerce, 2021; Bachelor of Science in Economics, 2022

**My business:** Benny

**Where it's located:** Vancouver, BC and Toronto, ON

**What we do:** Benny, short for benefits, is revolutionizing the energy-drink market and making “good energy” a daily purchase rather than an occasional rescue or pick me up. We’re the first to combine yerba mate and brain-boosting adaptogens into a crash- and jitter-free energy drink that promotes focus, longevity and metabolism while leaving out all the nasties. With Benny, you can *fuel* good about energy drinks.

**Our team is:** Small but mighty. We’ve built Benny’s distribution to span in 500-plus stores across Canada in one year. We’ve been able to do this with co-founders being our only two FTES (full-time equivalents), with amazing interns, brand ambassadors and partners helping to fill the gaps.

**Why we’re unique:** We’re the first in Canada to be blending these powerful ingredients, which is really exciting. On top of that, Benny is addressing an underserved female market in the energy-drink industry.

**Our ideal customer is:** Benny really is for anyone and can be an incredible wellness booster for anyone, but our ideal customer is like us—young women who want to do their best in the world.



**Our business mantra:** Every day is a school day.

**I wasn't expecting...** How difficult and fragmented the grocery industry is. Big players literally own the majority of the grocery store, and it takes a ton of money to make a dent.

**Right now, our biggest challenge is:** Tackling it all as a very small team. We know if we had the opportunity to build our team further, which we will soon, we would be able to make even more traction.

**We'll know we're successful when:** We're able to live comfortably off the money Benny pays us—a.k.a. we will be able to order an appetizer and dessert without thinking twice.

**Where to find us:** At 500-plus amazing retail partners across Canada, on Amazon and on our site [drinkbenny.com](http://drinkbenny.com), where you can find our store locator, too.

**Bottom line:** Take the risk! There are wins and there are lessons, but you'll never regret giving something you're passionate about your 100 per cent. †

# Class Notes

## News and photos from around the alumni world

### 1970s

The latest book by poet, UVic alumna and former UVic Creative Writing prof **MARILYN BOWERING**, BA '71, MA '73, is billed as a "journey to understand the life of a Gaelic Scottish bard and the reach of her poetry across time and space." In *More Richly in Earth: A Poet's Search for Mary MacLeod*, Bowering pieces together the puzzle of radically different accounts of the 17th-century Scottish writer's life, returning to the places the bard once lived with the help of contemporary Scottish Gaelic poets and scholars.

**ROBIN MARLES**, BSc '77, retired last year after more than 20 years with Health Canada and 14 years in academia at Brandon University and the University of Ottawa. In addition to receiving numerous awards for his work on quality, safety and efficacy of natural-health products and plant-derived drugs, Marles was recently named a Scientist Emeritus with the Health Products and Food Branch of Health Canada.

**ALLAN WOODBURY**, BA '72, has written and self-published the novel *Rope Fender*. Billed as a historical romance, the work of fiction is inspired by true events and set in Vancouver and Point Grey between the First World War and 1935. The novel is available in softcover and e-book versions through Amazon.ca.



**ANNE CROSE (SCHILPEROORT)**, BMus '75, who received a Master's in Music after UVic, began her musical career in Victoria as Head of Accompanying, a department she set up at the Victoria Conservatory of Music. She was "loaned" to UVic to teach accompanying to all piano students. She held this conservatory position for five years and then branched off to freelance, teaching one year at Lester B. Pearson College, before moving to Toronto. There she expanded her performance experience, playing in Montreal, Calgary, Edmonton and Carnegie Hall, as well as giving chamber music recitals in Germany and the Middle East.

After marrying a Washington State farmer in 1987 and raising three children, she accepted the job as adjunct Piano Professor of Yakima Valley Community College, a position she held for 29 years. For 30 years, she continued performing annually in Germany and even added an engagement in Romania.

Currently she serves as principal pianist with the Yakima Symphony Orchestra and Chorus among a host of other accompanying jobs. Since 2015, Crose has spent her summers teaching Syrian refugee children music, art and English at the College of the Constant Lighthouse in Beirut, Lebanon.

**DIANA HAYES**, BA '78, has published her seventh book of poetry, *Sapphire and the Hollow Bone* (Ekstasis Editions). In 2019, she took on the role of publisher and launched Raven Chapbooks, an imprint of Rainbow Publishers

which was established by her father, the late John L. Hayes. "I have very fond memories of my time at the University of Victoria, especially working in the Special Collection Division at McPherson Library," says Hayes. "I believe my education at UVic set me on an excellent track for my writing career."



**MARION BULLER**

UVic double alumna **MARION BULLER** (BA '75, JD '87) has been reappointed for a second term as UVic's Chancellor. Prior to being appointed UVic Chancellor in January 2022, Buller was an influential legal scholar, the initial First Nations woman to be appointed as a judge in British Columbia and the former chief commissioner of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. A member of the Mistawasis Nêhiyawak, a Cree First Nation in Saskatchewan, she is a longtime advocate for Indigenous issues and rights. In an interview with the university, Buller said: "I give credit to the Alumni Association for establishing the Indigenous Alumni Community. We provide support for students while they are studying at UVic but after convocation, we let them go off into the world. The network is a way for Indigenous alumni to

come together and look after each other. I'm pleased that this program continues UVic's support and networking especially for Indigenous people."

### 1980s

After retiring from an "interesting" journalism career that took him to the US and UK, **BRENDAN READ**, BA '84, is now a volunteer at the Royal BC Museum. "I find volunteering at the RBCM very rewarding," says Read. "I am proud to help tell British Columbia's amazing story and to help tell important stories from other parts of our planet to our visitors. I meet people both from around the world and from my community alike, answer their questions and share information, working with a great team of individuals."

Congratulations to **SUROMITRA SANATANI**, BA '85, winner of the 2024 Women's Executive Network Canadian Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Chair of the Board Award.

Sanatani has served on the board of directors of Canada Post since 2018, the last four years as chair, ushering in a five-year strategy to advance equity, diversity and inclusion in the workplace. The annual CED! Awards recognize bold role models who promote and keep equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging at the forefront. Their actions, values and beliefs create a foundation on which women across all dimensions of diversity can feel safe, comfortable, supported and encouraged.

## 1990s

UVic writing grad and varsity rower **DEB MILLER LANDAU**, BFA '97, has released the true crime book *A Devil Went Down to Georgia*. It details the shocking events that followed the 1987 brutal murder of Black socialite Lita McClinton Sullivan, who was gunned down by a flower delivery man in one of the whitest, richest neighbourhoods in Atlanta.

Miller Landau first wrote about this story for *Atlanta* magazine two decades ago. That work appeared in the Best American Crime Writing anthology. She is the winner of a 2023 Oregon Literary Arts Fellowship and lives in Portland, Oregon. As a former rower, Miller Landau remembers her time at UVic "toggling between late-night poetry readings and early mornings on Elk Lake." She adds that she owes her journalism chops and writing career to former UVic writing prof Stephen Hume.



**DEB MILLER LANDAU**

Fraser Valley school teacher **SHERILYN RAE (THIESSEN)**, BEd '98, recently published the illustrated children's book *One Million Kisses*. Available at Amazon and Barnes & Noble, the book chronicles the universal nature of a mother's love while

celebrating diversity. Each page represents a different culture and varying levels of ability. This fall



Rae started her master's degree at Thompson Rivers

University with the goal of becoming a school counsellor.

Corporate strategist and insurance and investment advisor **ERIC WATCHORN**, BA '90, has co-authored the new book *Financial Blindspots: Insider Secrets to Discovering Financial Freedom*. Billed as a "groundbreaking guide built to bring clarity to your financial journey," the book invites readers to explore wealth-management avenues they may not have considered. More info at [financialblindspotsbook.com](http://financialblindspotsbook.com).

**TAMAS DOBOZY**, BA '91, has written a new book called *Stasio: A Novel in Three Parts*.

Presented in three distinct novellas, the detective novel traces the ever deepening involvement of protagonist Anthony de Stasio in a series of political nightmares, to the tormented life of a daughter



imprisoned in a world her father built, to the workings of a mysterious postwar utopian cult. Dobozy is a

professor in the Department of English and Film Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University and has published four books of short fiction. Dobozy won an O Henry Prize in 2011, and the Gold Medal for Fiction at the National Magazine Awards in 2014.

Geography grad **RICHARD LAMY**, BSc '95, has retired after a long career with Parks Canada in law enforcement, resource conservation and Indigenous partnerships.



**JOHN WENSVEEN**

In September, Geography grad **JOHN WENSVEEN**, BA '96, was appointed to the position of president at the International Space University in Strasbourg, France. He had previously held the position of Chief Innovation Officer, Nova Southeastern University and Executive Director, Alan B. Levan | NSU Broward Center of Innovation in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Founded in 1987, the International Space University (ISU) is the world's leading institution for the interdisciplinary study of space. From its central campus in Strasbourg, France, ISU offers a range of academic programs and professional development courses, both in Strasbourg and around the world, that cover all aspects of space exploration and development, including engineering, science, policy and business.

Earlier this year, **EDEN ROBINSON**, BFA '92, received a prestigious Indspire Award, in the Arts category. It is the highest honour the Indigenous

community bestows upon its own people. The novelist and short-story writer from BC's Haisla Nation and Heiltsuk Nation is well known for her delightful laugh and her five bestselling novels that combine humour and supernatural elements with contemporary Indigenous experiences. The UVic Distinguished Alumni Award recipient has been nominated for the country's top literary awards. Her novels include *Monkey Beach* and the Trickster Trilogy: *Son of a Trickster*, *Trickster Drift* and *Return of the Trickster*.

This past spring, UVic Writing's Climate Disaster Project, led by grad and writing prof **SEAN HOLMAN**, BA '99, won a Special Recognition Citation at the National Newspaper Awards. "We are so honoured the National Newspaper Awards have recognized our efforts to empower disaster-affected communities inside and outside Canada," said Holman, the UVic Wayne Crookes Professor of Environmental & Climate Journalism.

"We are entering a new era of disaster, where our seasons will become increasingly defined by the traumatic events they bring, and we need to learn how journalism can help us survive those traumas together."

**VANESSA WINN**, BA '90, has contributed a chapter to *Métis Matriarchs:*



*Agents of Transition*, recently released by the University of Regina Press. Her chapter is a

biographical study of Josette Lagacé Work, the only featured matriarch who lived in BC. In writing the study, Winn drew from her research for her two historical novels, based on local people and events in the 19th century.

Journalist and 2015 Distinguished Alumni Award recipient **LUCAS AYKROYD**, BA '96, MA '97, founded the Irene Adler Prize, an annual scholarship for women writers, in 2017. Since then, the long-time Olympic hockey reporter has written about women's sports for the *New York Times*, ESPN, and Canada.com and edited the *WomenSport* International newsletter. Aykroyd also covered Women Deliver, the world's largest conference on gender equality, for *Ms. Magazine*. His stories on women's issues have appeared in publications ranging from the *Globe and Mail* and *Vancouver Magazine* to *Mental Floss* and *Shondaland*.

## 2000s

Child and Youth Care grad **ROSANNA ELVES**, BA '04, has published numerous poems and short fiction in literary magazines and anthologies, but she can now add children's author to her resume. Inspired by her



**ROSANNA ELVES**

young daughter, Elves worked with an illustrator to bring to life *The Amusingly Amazing Alphabet*. No ordinary ABC book, each page reads like a humorous story, and the book includes tips for extended learning for teachers, parents and caregivers to get the most out of repetitive readings of the book. You can follow her on Instagram @grit\_and\_roses

**ROBIN KOOYMAN**, BCom '08, is the new Chief Financial Officer of Blackline Safety, a leader in connected gas detection and lone worker safety. Kooyman brings 15 years of global experience in finance, capital markets and strategic leadership, having held prominent positions with Brookfield Corporation, TD Securities and RBC Capital Markets in Canada, the US and the UK.

**AMY BOWEN**, BCom '07, has been appointed general manager of HydroOne, Ontario's biggest utility company.



**VAL NAPOLEON**

UVic double grad and professor **VAL NAPOLEON**, LLB '01, PhD '09, is the recipient of the Royal Society of Canada's Yvan Allaire Medal for her groundbreaking work in revitalizing Indigenous law. At UVic's Faculty of Law, Napoleon has been a driving

force behind several key initiatives, including founding the Indigenous Law Research Unit and co-developing the groundbreaking Juris Doctor/Juris Indigenarum Doctor (JD/JID) dual degree program. Napoleon is also co-leading the creation of the National Centre for Indigenous Laws opening in Spring 2025.

## 2010s

At the age of 32, **TARA SIDHOO FRASER**, BA '16, suffered a stroke due to a rare mutation in her brain, leaving her with no memory of her previous life. Fraser's new memoir, *When My Ghost Sings*, is a detailed journey



of her recovery and a lucid exploration of amnesia. Since releasing the book, Fraser has attended the Saskatchewan Festival of Words, FOLD festival, Whistler Writers Festival and the Sunshine Coast Festival of Words. More information at arsenalpulp.com.

Proud UVic grad **POLLY SHRESTHA**, BA '16, was kind enough to reach out to us with a healthy dose of joy. "In 2021, I was blessed with the opportunity to embrace motherhood, welcoming a vibrant, inquisitive, and loving child into my life," she writes. "This little bundle of joy has illuminated my world in ways I never imagined. Reflecting on my journey as a mother, it's been a whirlwind of beautiful chaos, brimming with curiosity, creativity, and kindness. Every



**POLLY SHRESTHA and child**

moment has been both challenging and immensely rewarding. I'm excited to share our very first selfie together, capturing the essence of our dynamic duo—the 'millennial and the mini millennial!'"

Former UVic Chancellor and Honorary alumna **SHELAGH ROGERS** has been named Queen's University's new Chancellor. As Chancellor of University of Victoria from 2015 to 2021, Rogers made her mark on UVic and brought her joy, warmth and intellect to many alumni events.

## 2020s

**SALONI RAJESH SHAVDIA**, BA '21, has started her own social justice consultancy in Kenya. At NIRAJKA Consultancy, Rajesh Shavdia facilitates workshops on racism and discrimination,



**SALONI RAJESH SHAVDIA**



# CONTINUING STUDIES @UVIC

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intersectionality, diversity, equity and inclusion, gender equality and equity, and "How can I change?" NIRAJKA Consultancy's slogan is "You create your reality." More information at [nirajka.org](http://nirajka.org).



**KIRSTEN BOLLEN**

Artist **KIRSTEN BOLLEN**, MPA '20, was recently commissioned to paint 16 large panels depicting local mountain landscapes for the newly opened Moxy Banff hotel.

The colourful panels feature iconic local landscapes such as Three Sisters, Lake Louise, Peyto Lake and Rundle Mountain, and can be seen in the hotel's lobby bar. You can check out more of Kirsten's work at [kirstenbollen.com](http://kirstenbollen.com) and Instagram [@kirst.makes.art](https://www.instagram.com/kirst.makes.art).

UVic alum **NICOLE F. SMITH's**, MA'04, BA'97, book *Dig Deep: Connecting Archaeology, Oceans, and Us*, won a national award for



public communication from the Canadian Archaeological Association. The

award was announced at the 56th Annual Meeting of the Canadian Archaeological Association in Saskatoon and recognizes outstanding contributions in communication that further insight and appreciation of Canadian archaeology.

**ADAM GAUTHIER**, CYC '21, is the recipient of an Indspire Award, the highest honour the Indigenous community bestows upon its own people. Gauthier won in the Youth—First Nation category. For Two-Spirit Gauthier, from BC's Tla'amin Nation, Indigenous wellness is at the heart of everything he does. The UVic grad is immersed in teachings about traditional language, humility, listening, respect and cultural competencies. One of his endeavours is the Wellness Project, an initiative that creates wellness kits for on-reserve and urban Indigenous children and youth across Vancouver Island. Gauthier now works at the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation as a trainer. He always strives to advocate for voice and choice, access to equal and adequate resources and culturally safe services. 

### What's New With You?

Be in the next Class Notes. Send news and photos to: [torch@uvic.ca](mailto:torch@uvic.ca)

## Farewells

In February 2024, **STEPHEN A. BIGSBY**, BA '68, died after a long illness. Born in Victoria in 1946, Bigsby completed his graduate degree in political science and economics at UVic. This was followed by an MBA at Université Laval. He is mourned by Elisabetta, his wife of 46 years, his sister Gail, his sister-in-laws, nieces and nephews in Canada, England and Italy, and his many good friends.

The UVic alumni community mourns the passing of **SHIRLEY TUCKER**, who died peacefully in Victoria on July 3 at the age of 107. Born Shirley Aileen Walker in 1917, she completed the two-year program at Victoria College in 1934-36, when the college was based at Craigdarroch Castle. After Victoria College, Tucker's education took her to the US where she earned a bachelor's degree at the University of Washington and a Master's from Columbia University Teacher's College in New York. A specialist in textiles, she taught home economics, serving on the faculties of Oregon State University, UCLA and Ventura College. She returned to Victoria in 1981. She moved back into the family home that she first occupied in 1932 and remained



**SHIRLEY TUCKER in the 1930s**

there for life. Tucker was president of the Victoria College Craigdarroch Castle Alumni Association in the mid-1980s and remained an active member of the UVic Alumni Association for many decades. Some will remember her as a docent in the "college room" of Craigdarroch Castle, where she engaged visitors from around the world with stories and photos of her days as a Victoria College student at the castle.

Dr. **LOREN ACKER**, born on Aug. 6, 1936, died of a heart attack at home on Aug. 16, 2024. Acker was a professor of psychology at UVic before his retirement in 1996. He was a radical behavioural psychologist devoted to the betterment of humanity and the planet. He published the monograph *AIDS-Proofing Your Kids* at the height of the AIDS epidemic. He was the author of many articles and chapters and a researcher into child psychology (often using his daughters as subjects). Acker was married three times, lastly to his surviving wife Sandra Acker, and was father to six daughters (two step and four of birth: Becky, Maleea, Kasey, Kelly, Shevon and Lorien). He spent his retirement, and much of his working years, sailing the Gulf Islands, Desolation Sound and the central coast inlets of BC. Known for his delight in nature, his dedication to learning and teaching, his infectious sense of humour and his stubbornness, he was an enormous-hearted, always learning, affectionate, brilliant, gentle, opinionated scientist. He lauded the scientific method but was emotion-dominated; he was a painter and singer, harmonica player, crab-dissector, bawdy

song singer, handsome, secular Jew and know-it-all socialist with a long history of political activism and social justice.

**NANCY JOAN SNELGROVE** (nee **MONTGOMERY**) passed away on July 31, 2024 in Oakville, ON, just three months' shy of her 100th birthday. As she often observed herself, she had had a particularly adventurous and interesting life. She grew up in Vancouver and Victoria and earned a Bachelor of Science in



**Graduation photo of NANCY SNELGROVE**

Nursing Teaching and Administration at UVic in 1948. In 1950, she travelled to Brazil to marry **DIX (WILLIAM RICHARD NOBLE) SNELGROVE**, (UVic BSc in metallurgy, 1949). Over their 40-year marriage they lived in Brazil, Zambia, Spain and England as well as exploring the southeastern part of Africa and Western Europe, returning to Canada in 1970. Dix passed away in 1991.

Snelgrove loved and remained interested in the wideness of the world. She was a passionate supporter of women's rights and started the Birth Control Team at Toronto General Hospital (1972). Later, she became a skillful spinner and weaver. She enjoyed politics and was an avid reader of biographies and

thick books on evolution and genetics—even into her 90s. Last but not least, she had a rich and lasting relationship with music, especially classical and opera. She leaves behind her three children, Lynn, Martin and Susan, six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren—with another on the way.



**SORIN POP with his family**

**SORIN POP** died suddenly on Oct. 1, 2023, at Jordan River, BC while on a motorcycling trip. He was 56 years young. He is survived by his adoring children, Ethan and Cella, and his loving wife, Chantal. Sorin immigrated to Canada in 1993 from Romania after receiving a full scholarship for his Master in Mechanical Engineering from UVic. In 2005, he achieved the dean's list for his MBA. Sorin earned a Master of Applied Science from UVic in 1996, followed by an MBA in 2006. When he passed, he had just started his new position as the Director of Pharamnet for the Province of BC. Sorin was passionate about technology and education as ways to improve people's lives. He is greatly missed by those lucky to have known him. He will be remembered as caring, generous, funny, thoughtful and dedicated to family.

Te iubim, Tati!

— **Chantal Levesque**,  
**BA '95, BEd '99, Cert '99**



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# Supporting the Next Generation

UVic alumnus **Georgi Ignatov**, MBA '00, who is originally from Bulgaria, built a successful nutritional supplements company. He is now helping other young entrepreneurs on their journey.

BY CLAY SHELDON, BFA '15



UVic alumnus **GEORGI IGNATOV** with his family.

**A**s a young person growing up in Bulgaria, Georgi Ignatov never imagined that one day he could have his own business. Yet, after completing his education, including an MBA at the University of Victoria, he managed to build a successful nutritional supplements company.

Now, he wants to help other students know that they can succeed, too. He has set up a scholarship to assist international students who want to attend UVic and have a passion for entrepreneurship and environmental studies.

Georgi grew up in a small Bulgarian village of 1,000 people. His parents were engineers at the local copper mine. After graduating high school, he set his sights on Canada and eventually found himself at UVic, earning a Master in Business Administration in 2000.

Georgi considered his time at UVic to be his best educational experience. He felt fortunate to be able to study under Dr. Ron Mitchell, who was leading the UVic Entrepreneurship program at the time. Georgi credits this training with giving him the confidence to become an entrepreneur.

“I found the idea of having my own business intriguing, but I didn’t truly believe that it was possible for me,” says Georgi. “When somebody wants to start their own company, they think ‘I’m not good enough. I don’t know enough. I’m too young and inexperienced,’ and that program just gave me the confidence and belief that I can actually do it one day.”

Years later, Georgi put the skills learned at UVic into action, creating a company called NATURELO Premium Supplements. The supplements available on the market at the time were mainly synthetic, but Georgi found that customers were asking for natural alternatives with vitamins derived from real plants rather than artificial ingredients made in a lab. In 2016, Georgi launched an all-natural line of vitamin supplements that soared to success on Amazon.com over the next four years. In 2020, he sold NATURELO to a large American company. Having succeeded in business, Georgi decided to help others do the same.

He began by giving back to his country of birth. “I’ve always felt connected to the country I’m from. My parents were still living there, and I felt the need

to contribute back to the country that shaped me as an individual. I wanted to help other kids who, due to financial reasons, are not able to pursue their education and to enhance educational opportunities in Bulgaria generally.”

He set up the Ignatov Family Foundation, which partners with established Bulgarian charities to provide financial assistance and program development. This includes renovating schools to make them more modern and exciting, including outfitting classrooms with visually stimulating wallpaper that contains inspirational messages.

He also helped develop an entrepreneurship program for Bulgarian high school students, where kids get lessons on financial literacy and on how to start their own ventures. Since Bulgaria is a developing country, Georgi felt the children there could use good role models and more positive reinforcement to cultivate the belief that they could be financially successful. “Empowering young people to start their own businesses is what can grow an economy and make a country more prosperous,” he says.

Back when Georgi was attending UVic, he remembers how approximately half of the students in his MBA class were international students. Since then, fees for international students have continued to rise. So, he set up the Georgi Ignatov MBA in Sustainable Innovation Scholarship to specifically help international students with an interest in entrepreneurship and environmental studies.

“I think that supporting entrepreneurs is key to growing the economy... the real innovation, the real breakthroughs, come from individuals who leave the corporate world and start their own ventures. I want to encourage that both in Canada and in Bulgaria.”

For Georgi, the fuel for his philanthropy is the same spark that was ignited in him 25 years ago. “The main message is just to believe in yourself that you are good enough. You are smart enough. You’re not too young. Regardless of your circumstances, you can start your own company and you can be successful.” †

# Adventures in Teaching

Education grad **Nya Harle** finds joys and challenges working in São Paulo, Brazil, where personal connection takes centre stage.

BY NYA HARLE, BED '20

Teaching has always been my gateway to adventure, and this drive comes from my father's own journey as an educator and explorer. In his 20s, as a graduate of UVic, he embarked on a teaching opportunity in the remote Inuit community of Igloodik, Qikiqtaaluk Region in Nunavut, northern Canada. He often shared stories of cultural immersion and navigating language barriers. Later, our family spent two year-long teacher exchanges in Australia, and these experiences inspired me to combine my own career with international opportunities.

When I first set out to teach abroad, I knew I was in for an adventure, but the depth of personal and professional growth I experienced exceeded my expectations. My journey as a teacher has taken me to the bustling, vibrant schools of Brazil. I currently teach at Escola Castanheiras in São Paulo, where young adults work towards an International Baccalaureate (IB). Along the way, I've encountered culture clashes and learned what it truly means to adapt as an educator in a global environment.

Teaching in Brazil is more than showing up to work—it's a full immersion into a culture that prioritizes connection, warmth and physical closeness. My first teaching position abroad was in Belo Horizonte, an IB school. I was part of a small group of international colleagues, all navigating the challenges of teaching in a country with vastly different customs.

In Canada, my teaching experience emphasized structure, personal space and clear professional boundaries with students. We're taught to build relationships, of course, but with a degree of formality and physical distance. On my first day in Brazil, students greeted me with hugs, parents gave me cheek kisses, and my instinct to maintain distance was met with confusion. To them, my reluctance to embrace this warmth was seen as aloofness.

It was a wake-up call. My first lesson in Brazil was not about curriculum or classroom management—it was about adapting to a culture where human connection takes centre stage, and physical gestures are part of connecting with our community.

Meeting and making friends with teachers from other countries in Brazil helped me feel less isolated and more confident. I realized that teaching abroad is not just about mastering another country's curriculum; it's about becoming part of a global community of educators who are constantly learning from each other. Food, music and celebrations have been key in sparking conversations with my colleagues and new friends. I've enjoyed exploring traditional Brazilian dishes like pão de queijo, moqueca and feijoada, and taking part in events like churrascos and Carnaval. Experiencing Brazilian music, especially pagode, has also been a memorable way to connect.

If teaching in Brazil has taught me anything, it's that adaptation is not a one-way street. My students have also learned to adapt to me, to my "cold culture" quirks, and to the Canadian values I bring to the classroom. For example, I prefer more personal space, I don't get cold easily and like to keep the windows open, and I maintain clear boundaries by keeping my personal life private, including not allowing them to add me on social media. We've grown together, building a learning environment that's not just about aca-



ademic success but about understanding and embracing different perspectives.

My time in Brazil has made me a more empathetic and flexible educator. The experiences of cultural immersion—whether it's navigating a hug-filled hallway or discussing global perspectives with students—have expanded my understanding of what it means to be a teacher. It's not just about delivering content; it's about creating a space where students can connect with the world beyond their immediate surroundings. †

**Nya Harle is Canadian certified educator with a passion for global education and cultural exchange. She is originally from Campbell River.**



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## OFF CAMPUS



PHOTO: TANYA FIONA

## Sharing Friendship in Ukraine

Humanities graduate and UVic employee **ROB JOHNS**, BA '91, took a special goodwill trip to Ukraine over the summer with his therapy dog, Tango. The duo shared care, concern and a listening ear with the people they met there, who have suffered immense stress and sorrow under the devastating war with Russia. Johns and Tango are pictured in Irpin, Ukraine surrounded by the wreckage of cars destroyed when the occupants tried to escape the Russian invasion. For more on the goodwill trip, see page 4.