

# UVIC TORCH

## *Rescuers & Helpers*

The UVic community is working to save children's vision, create a safer drug supply, avert disasters, improve the health of first responders and more—all to help preserve people, places and things of value.

*Lucy Bell Sdahl K'awaas is working to bring Haida objects and Ancestors home and decolonize museums.*

## Cheer Champs

The UVic Vikes Cheer team soared to first place earlier this year with a gold-medal win at the University World Cheer Championships. The Vikes team, seen here performing for a home crowd at CARSA, nailed a flawless routine at the competition in Orlando, Florida. The Vikes topped their division and also won the Nations Cup, awarded to the highest-scoring team out of all 15 from across the globe.

Credit: APShutter.com





# Table of Contents

UVic Torch Alumni Magazine • Spring 2023



A technician tests a drug sample at Substance Drug Checking in the North Park neighbourhood of Victoria.

## Features

### 10 Bringing Haida Home

Distinguished alumna **LUCY BELL SDAHL K'AWAAS** is a leader in repatriating Haida Ancestral remains, cultural artifacts and art.

### 12 Lending a Lifeline

University of Victoria researchers across disciplines are teaming up to staunch the loss of lives from toxic-drug poisoning, including forging state-of-the-art techniques to check drugs. Writing grad **STEPHANIE HARRINGTON** delves into their extraordinary work.

### 18 Strength in Language

**BELINDA KAKIYOSĒW DANIELS** is teaching the next generation of nehiyawewin (Cree) language keepers.

### 19 Emergency Contact

Humanities grad **ERIN STOCKILL** built upon skills gained at UVic to become a key player in emergency management and preparedness.

### 20 Putting Responders First

UVic professor **LYNNETH STUART-HILL** and graduate student **THOMAS SERVICE** study ways to protect emergency personnel from harms they face on the job.

### 22 Saving Sight

Alumna **BRIDGET RYAN** and biology professor **BOB CHOW** are working on a gene therapy to halt the progression of Stargardt disease, which causes blindness.

### 24 Diamond in the Rough

A degree in Theatre set the stage for **EMILY BAILEY**'s work as a certified mine rescuer in BC's north.



Theatre grad **EMILY BAILEY** is a certified mine rescuer.

**24**



Fine Arts grad **SARAH JIM** received a 2023 Emerging Alumni Award.

**26**

## Departments

**4 EDITOR'S NOTE**

**5 PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE**

By Kevin Hall, University of Victoria president and vice-chancellor

**6 RINGSIDE** New album by Christopher Butterfield; the clean energy shift

**29 THE CHANGE UP** Social worker Amy Pinnell started a unique business to support her colleagues.

**31 CLASS NOTES**

**35 VOX ALUMNI** Kelly Bouchard, BA '14, returns to life as a wildfire fighter.

**38 OFF CAMPUS** Iqaluit scene by UVic Distinguished Alumni Award recipient Madeleine Redfern.

**31**



*Sutra* by UVic grad **ERIK CHEUNG**, aka Kire.

# More than Bedpans

A surprise life event led UVic Nursing grad **Melanie Stack** from the bedside to the boardroom—navigating the choppy waters of pandemic planning.

BY JENNY MANZER, BA '97



MELANIE STACK

**M**elanie Stack was living a busy, stressful life as a nurse in Victoria, when she unexpectedly became the patient instead of the care provider. “I started my career in the emergency department and had a car accident that took me away from the bedside,” says Stack, who earned a BScN/RN degree from UVic/Camosun in 2008.

The 2010 accident caused physical limitations that made the rigours of bedside nursing tough. She lasted to 2014, then made the major decision to leave emergency nursing. “It was a big loss of identity,” she recalls. That was when she realized: “OK, your career is not who you are.”

She started her new path by taking UVic’s Certificate in Business Administration in 2013. Her hands-on experience made her want to help strategize to head off problems and challenges. “My hope is that with the administration, I can help my colleagues at all levels... a solid strategy is going to

help us get through this phase in the health care system, that I hope is a phase,” says Stack, who served as the Director of COVID Immunization Operations until April of 2022.

The pandemic presented a Himalayan learning climb. “There are two types of people when it comes to a crisis. One, who are very much looking for the safety and comfort of what they know. And then there are ones who see this as an opportunity and rise to it.”

She learned she can function on little sleep. “And I thrive on constant change... I somewhat knew this from my emergency-nursing career, but I thrive on that constant change. You make a decision, good, bad or otherwise, and what’s next, what’s next, what’s next.”

Planning immunizations on a massive scale involved pivoting, collaboration and trying to figure it out in the moment. “We didn’t have anyone who’d worked in a pandemic before,” she says. There were manuals, but they were not tethered to lived experience.

Stack recently completed UVic’s Certificate in Emergency Management for Organizational Continuity. It’s her way of reconciling what happened during the pandemic to explore on a theoretical level why things happened the way they did.

Last Halloween, Stack, who is now Lead, Human Resources Initiatives for Island Health, bought herself a Westie terrier, which she named Kit Kat, to celebrate making it through the crisis. She is confident we—and she—are far better prepared for the next one. “I’m a firm believer that problems are solvable and you can approach things different ways.”

It’s been quite a journey for someone who resisted nursing at first and wanted to become a flight attendant—but was too short to reach the overhead bins. “I’m so glad I stayed. It’s more than bedpans. It’s the problem solving, the caring for people, the creativity. You are everything to people who are quite dependent upon you. It really pushes you to rise up to a higher level as a professional and a person as well.”

*Note:* There will be no print edition of the *UVic Torch* Alumni Magazine in fall 2023, as we research ways to serve our readers better and provide even more compelling stories and information.

## TORCH



Volume 44, Number 1 • Spring 2023

The *UVic Torch Alumni Magazine* is published in the spring and autumn by the University of Victoria, Division of External Relations and We acknowledge and respect the lək̓ʷəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

**ADDRESS UPDATES AND CORRECTIONS**  
alumni@uvic.ca

**LETTERS**  
The *Torch* welcomes feedback from readers who wish to comment on anything they’ve read in the magazine.

*UVic Torch Alumni Magazine*  
PO Box 1700 STN CSC  
Victoria, BC V8W 2Y2  
**Phone:** 250-721-6000  
**Toll-free:** 1-800-808-6828  
**E-mail:** torch@uvic.ca

**EDITOR**  
Jenny Manzer, BA '97

**DESIGN AND PRODUCTION**  
Rayola Creative  
Clint Hutzulak, BA '89

**CHANCELLOR**  
Marion Buller, BA '75, LLB '87

**PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR**  
Kevin Hall

**VICE-PRESIDENT EXTERNAL RELATIONS**  
Chris Horbachevski

**PRESIDENT, UVIC ALUMNI ASSOCIATION**  
Gerry Bliss, BSc '77, BSc '87

Publication Mail Agreement No. 40010219

Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to:  
Advancement Services  
University of Victoria  
PO Box 1700 STN CSC  
Victoria BC V8W 2Y2

Printed in Canada ISSN 1191-7032



[uvic.ca/torch](http://uvic.ca/torch)

# Planning for Future Helpers

The University of Victoria's new strategic plan aims to look years into the future and will help those who help others.

BY KEVIN HALL, PHD. PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR



“We must have the courage to explore past injustices, be transparent about the role universities have played in upholding the dominant systems of power and face our own challenges to mend the damage done.”

## A PLAN FOR A CHANGING WORLD

We live in a rapidly changing world, marked by seemingly constant and immediate challenges that range from health crises and geopolitical strife, to climate change and growing inequities. In a world that is changing so quickly, we know that working to solve today's wicked problems won't be enough. We will need to be ready to address the unknown issues of tomorrow.

UVic's new strategic plan will provide us with a renewed purpose, a pledge to uphold Indigenous rights and a set of principles that will inspire and guide our decision-making for decades to come.

When we began the engagement process for the plan, we asked our communities about what was important for our collective future and how we can contribute to ensuring that future is sustainable, equitable and just. We heard loud and clear that bringing together different perspectives and lived experiences was critical to flexibly navigating the unknown—especially when tackling the big issues we all face as a society.

## A TRUSTED INSTITUTION

Universities are among the most trusted public institutions in society, and that trust is the foundation for our autonomy and our ability to work for the benefit of society.

To earn and maintain that trust it is necessary that we confront the difficult truths about our history. We must have the courage to explore past injustices, be transparent about the role universities have played in upholding the dominant systems of power and face our own challenges to mend the damage done. Our strategic plan will work in tandem with our Equity Action Plan and new Indigenous Plan to call out these systemic and historical barriers, offering targeted actions to begin our own mending process.

## THE ROLE OF A UNIVERSITY FOR THE FUTURE GOOD

As a public institution, UVic, and all universities, have the responsibility to develop knowledge and to educate and train the people necessary to protect our communities, our societies and our planet from immediate threats and potential future disasters as best we can. Universities need to promote creativity, innovation, collaboration, compassion and brilliance—not on our own, but together. It's our differences, our unique perspectives and lived experiences that allow us to build better solutions.

Our strategic plan will present a purpose statement that identifies us as a community-minded, globally engaged university where we transform ideas into meaningful impact. This is how we will train and support the rescuers and helpers of our time and beyond.

When you read the stories in this issue and learn about the great work being done here at UVic, turn your thoughts to the pathways that enabled this work. Our institutional lens must always be trained to review and assess the full potential of these initiatives. Did our rescuers and helpers have the right resources? Did our policies empower or delay their projects? Were there sufficient avenues and opportunities for collaboration and community involvement? These are the questions our new strategic plan will ask us all to consider.

We are prepared to face a changing world, to lift each other up and face the challenges that come our way with renewed commitment, enthusiasm, compassion and humility. The next leaders of tomorrow will be the helpers, rescuers and those who have earned the trust of their community through openness and courage. †

**UVic's new strategic plan will be launched in the fall—  
watch [uvic.ca/strategicplan](http://uvic.ca/strategicplan) for updates.**

# The Best Kind of Souvenir

Alumnus **Christopher Butterfield**, said to have a “wondrous and peculiar” sound, marks retirement with a new album.

BY JOHN THRELFALL, BA '96

Forget the gold watch: noted composer and longtime School of Music professor Christopher Butterfield, BMus, '75, is marking his retirement from the University of Victoria with the release of his latest album, *Souvenir*. Performed by longtime musical collaborators Aventa Ensemble, the 70-minute *Souvenir* (Redshift Records) features four newly recorded large-chamber pieces.

“Each piece was originally commissioned by a different ensemble in the country over a 20-year span—it’s like I’m doing my own musicology here,” chuckles Butterfield. “These have only ever been played live, and there’s a very singular reason why we could record them at all: Bill Linwood’s Aventa Ensemble. They have the capability of playing what is some fairly gnarly music, because they’re extraordinary players and they can do anything... in terms of musicianship and virtuosity, I’ll put this record up against anything, anywhere.”

Butterfield is particularly proud of the fact that the four epic tracks on *Souvenir*—1995’s “Souvenir” (21 minutes), 2001’s “Port Bou” (19 minutes) plus 2012’s “Frame” and 2013’s “Parc” (both 14 minutes)—are entirely BC-made, from the producing, recording and engineering right down to the CD’s design and manufacturing. Even the performers are all BC-based, with the sole exception of vibraphone player Rick Sacks, who guests on “Parc”—and was also part of Butterfield’s early-'80s Toronto-based new wave band, Klo.

*Souvenir*’s promotional material notes that Butterfield “has long centred the wondrous and peculiar” in his diverse catalogue of work that “spans the accessible to the absurd.” Does he feel that’s an apt description?



“I don’t think I go out of my way to be ‘wondrous and peculiar,’ but if that’s the way the music sounds, that’s fine, I’m glad there’s a story there,” he says. “I am very interested in harmony: I like to set things up and see what happens. Quite often it’ll appear to be a bunch of noise and then you’ll hear something that sounds very familiar, like a little coincidence. All music is heard in context of itself, so if a harmonic line jumps out, you hear it in terms of what you just heard and that will colour what you’re about to hear next.”

While Butterfield has been teaching composition at UVic since 1992, he first circled the Ring Road to study under renowned composer Rudolf Komorous and has since helped launch the careers of a new generation of acclaimed composers like Anna Höstman, BMis '01, MMus '05, Cassandra Miller, BMus '05, and Daniel Brandes, MMus '10.

“We’ve had a remarkable 40-plus years of building a reputation for composers who are looked at as rather remarkable... and nobody’s quite sure why,” he says. “Is it something in the water? Is it island life? Victoria has an extremely rich musical and cultural environment, but we’re also sort of disconnected and have to make everything up ourselves.”

As he prepares to take his final bow in UVic’s storied Phillip T. Young Recital Hall, Butterfield says he has been constantly impressed by both his undergraduate and graduate student composers, and he’s certain future students will thrive under the guidance of award-winning (and 2023 Juno-nominated) composition professor Anthony Tan. †

# The Clean Energy Shift

UVic charts new path to net zero with a community-based approach to addressing climate change.

BY RACHEL GOLDSWORTHY, BSC '91

**A**round the world, national governments are signing international agreements, setting targets and looking in all directions for strategies that will cut greenhouse gas emissions as quickly as possible. Along with that high-level work, there's much that can—and must—be done to support small to medium-sized communities in shifting quickly to low-carbon energy. UVic is a key catalyst in the global rethink on how finance, policy, data and new clean technologies can best be deployed to address climate change and support community action. More than three quarters of Canadian municipalities are outside major metropolitan areas, and many Indigenous Peoples live in rural and remote areas. As well, 280 remote Indigenous and Northern communities are not connected to the electricity grid or natural gas infrastructure, relying on diesel fuel or outside utilities for heat and electricity.

In April, the federal government recognized UVic's expertise and invested \$83.6 million in game-changing research. Accelerating Clean Energy Transformation (ACET) is a new national initiative led by UVic with more than 30 partners—five of them First Nations. The team is poised to walk alongside communities to develop solutions that fit their specific circumstances and geographies.

"UVic has a vital role in galvanizing the clean energy transition," says Dr. Lisa Kalynchuk, vice-president, research and innovation at UVic. "With ACET, we bridge lofty climate goals at the global and national levels and the local realities of communities. Together, we can be creative and courageous in working toward net zero."

ACET's founding executive director, Dr. Curran Crawford, has assembled a team of expert researchers and partners to build and test new clean technologies, and explore the socio-economic impacts and unintended consequences of rapid decarbonization.

As the former director of UVic's Institute for Integrated Energy Systems (IESVic), Crawford and his collaborators have been partnering with coastal communities for more than a decade to explore tidal and wave energy options, micro-grid integration, and energy storage options to avoid diesel-generated electricity.

The ACET team brings knowledge and investigative skills that are essential to understanding and addressing complex prob-



Accelerating Community Energy Transformation (ACET) is a collaborative initiative that brings together over 40 partners, including Indigenous knowledge keepers and community leaders, to create innovative place-based solutions for energy system transformation.

lems and finding new ways of doing things—from harvesting the energy potential of our oceans, to informing government on policy options, and bringing investors to the table to finance our future low-carbon economy.

"We're partnering with coastal and remote communities to explore tidal, wave, solar and wind energy, and looking at the potential for micro-grids that enable communities to produce their own energy to enhance climate and economic resilience," says Crawford. "At UVic, we are skilled incubators of novel concepts, and have long worked in support of communities. We are also nurturing the emerging great minds the world is counting on as never before. We are expert collaborators, because we do it all the time—with other universities and with communities, Indigenous Peoples, non-profits, the private sector, and all levels of government."

All that work will be integral to transforming community energy systems and developing scalable solutions that can be replicated around the world. The community case studies and demonstration projects will provide blueprints for success, placing Canada at the forefront of the global energy shift.

The Accelerating Community Energy Transformation team and its partners are aiming to bridge the gap between vision and action on climate change, empowering community-level leadership on a new path forward to net zero. †

A photograph of a wooden post with fish-shaped carvings and a tree trunk in a mossy forest setting. The post is on the left, and the tree trunk is in the center. The ground is covered in green moss. The background is a dense forest of evergreen trees.

From scientists working to save human sight, to cultural advisors and teachers who salvage languages, Ancestral remains and artifacts, to alumni who are saving workers from disasters or other emergencies, to teams trying to staunch the lives lost to toxic drugs—we explore **Rescuers & Helpers**, members of the University of Victoria community who preserve people, places and things of value.

PHOTO BY JIMMY JEONG



# Bringing Haida Home

**Distinguished alumna Lucy Bell Sdahl K'awaas is a leader in repatriating Haida Ancestral remains, cultural artifacts and art. The "Haida nerd" has a boundless passion for her culture and fights for Indigenous rights across the heritage sector.**

BY JODY PATERSON

There was a period after Lucy Bell Sdahl K'awaas graduated with her degree in anthropology when she wasn't at all sure she had made the right choice. Bell comes from "a long matrilineal line" of Haida grandmothers with a passion for learning and understanding in both the Haida and academic worlds. She had anticipated that getting an anthropology degree would be an ideal way to bridge those worlds. But leaving Haida Gwaii for the bright lights of the University of British Columbia (UBC) in the early 1990s "was a difficult experience," she recalls. The curriculum wasn't what she had expected.

"What was being taught in anthropology in those days felt quite abstract and out of touch. I felt bad after I graduated, like I'd wasted four years of my life," says Bell. "I came home to Massey feeling not proud to tell people I was pursuing anthropology."

Happily for the field of Indigenous heritage, those feelings weren't destined to last. Bell has gone on to become a leader in the work of repatriating Haida Ancestral remains, cultural artifacts and works of art taken from Haida Gwaii in the mid-to-late 1800s. What got Bell fired up again about her career choice was the Aboriginal Cultural Stewardship Program, a one-year course she took in 1995 after earning her undergrad degree.

The First Peoples Cultural Council launched the program in 1993 in partnership with the Royal BC Museum (RBCM), University of Victoria and the Museum of Anthropology at UBC. The diploma program was Bell's first introduction to UVic. She would return for a masters in Indigenous language revitalization in 2016.

Bell landed an internship at U'mista Cultural Centre in Alert Bay through the stewardship program. The work to ensure the survival of the cultural heritage of the Kwakwaka'wakw Peoples that was being done by the centre and Kwakwaka'wakw activist Gloria Cranmer-Webster—was a revelation for Bell. The self-proclaimed "Haida nerd" never looked back.

The late 1800s was a period when the Haida people had been all but wiped out by diseases brought by European colonists; the 1862 smallpox epidemic alone killed over 70 per cent of the Haida population. "The belongings and Ancestral remains were collected at such a terrible time in our history, when our ancestors were being hit so hard with disease," says Bell. "I'm sure a lot of anthropologists thought they were doing something good at the time, essentially salvaging the history of a dead people.

But they looted graves. They used poor identification. They traded and acquired objects in questionable ways."

Despite the devastating losses of those years, the Haida survived. But their personal treasures, art and even the bones of their ancestors had been stolen from them. Those items are now scattered around the world in the hands of museums, private collections and the black market, many of them with no paper trail. The work of getting them back is hard and slow, says Bell, a founding member of the Haida Repatriation Committee. She has co-ordinated the return of over 500 Haida remains over the years from North American and European museums, but a day when all belongings are back in Haida hands remains a distant dream.

"We are slowly repatriating, but it's a case-by-case situation," says Bell. "It requires a lot of consultation, a lot of research, the right matrilineal people. Provenance is very complicated, especially with limited paperwork and so many different writing systems among individual collections."

"We've spent 30 years bringing home Ancestral remains, and reminding museums that these are human beings, not specimens for display. It's slow to happen—every museum is different, and none of them has one blanket rule for everything in the collection."

Repatriated artifacts and remains are returned to the Haida community as a whole, which then works with descendants and the Haida Gwaii Museum in Skidegate to decide next steps. Museums are much more open to the work of repatriation than they once were, she says. But that's not to say that all barriers have come down.

"I think it's colonial and patriarchal attitudes that affect this work, the fear of doing something different," says Bell. "I definitely see a fear among museums that they're going to open the gates and the world's museum collections will be emptied. And oftentimes, the barrier is just racism."

People need not fear that traditional museums will soon have nothing to display given the painfully slow pace of repatriation, Bell muses. "We will need changes to policy, legislation, funding and mindset to support this work," she says, noting that she's involved in work right now with the First Peoples' Cultural Council to develop a cost analysis for Indigenous repatriation in BC.

"There really needs to be provincial and federal support for this. Museums and Indigenous people in BC are quite active in



LUCY BELL SDAHL K'AWAAS  
seen at the Royal BC Museum.

“We’ve spent 30 years bringing home Ancestral remains, and reminding museums that these are human beings, not specimens for display.”

repatriation, but they could all use financial support and backing. For the Haida Nation, we figure that just the repatriating of our Ancestors has cost us \$1 million. It costs a lot to clean up what went before us.”

Bell is currently a full-time PhD student at Simon Fraser University, where she is researching Indigenous museology and Haida museum practice in particular. Before that, she spent three years as RBCM’s inaugural head of the First Nations Department and Repatriation Program, but quit that position in summer 2020 with a no-holds-barred farewell speech that called out museum staff and executive for racist behaviour.

*“I’ve found that since I put in my resignation, there’s been a lot of finger-pointing—‘who caused this?’ You can’t point at one person,”* Bell said in the speech, which was reported in national media. *“My friends, my colleagues, I want you to hear and feel my anger, my hurt, my shame, my frustration. I don’t want you to e-*

*mail me later and explain yourself. I don’t want you to do further research to prove your points. What I want you to do is to accept your white privilege and do something about it.”*

The speech prompted the BC Public Service Agency to hire a third-party investigator and a diversity-inclusion consultant. In 2021, Bell was awarded the Nora and Ted Sterling Prize in Support of Controversy for her bravery “in calling out racism in the heritage field and advocating for change in an era of reconciliation.”

Reflecting now on her departure from RBCM, Bell says she left for her own well-being. It was only after she quit that she realized just how much pain that Indigenous people and other visible minorities were holding about the heritage community’s treatment of their own histories, belongings and Ancestors.

Her fiery speech galvanized others in the field, and led Bell and two colleagues to create Indigenous Museum Cousins. The network of 30 people is committed to supporting one another and decolonizing the heritage sector. “It’s an exciting stage for us,” says Bell. “We’re treading slowly, supporting one another. We’ll see what we want to come out of this.”

Bell is delighted that her 21-year-old daughter, Amelia, is following in her mother’s footsteps and now doing her own internship at U’mista Cultural Centre. “When we started this work of repatriation almost 30 years ago, I thought, “This is hard work, but we are making it easier for our children to carry on,” reflects Bell.

As her repatriation work continues, Bell has her eye on other dreams as well: A cultural and research centre in her home town of Old Massett, G?aw in X?aad kíl and a return of that long-gone stewardship program so that more Indigenous people can connect to the important work of reclamation.

The bringing home of Haida history ensures that the stories of the past are integrated into the ongoing story of a thriving Indigenous culture, adds Bell. “Visitors who come to the Haida Gwaii Museum are getting the real story now, seeing the real Haida—not just the past, but contemporary artwork as well. Our cultures are still vibrant!” she says. “I really hope people are excited about this.” †

# Lending a Lifeline

University of Victoria researchers across disciplines are teaming up to staunch the loss of lives from toxic-drug poisoning, including forging state-of-the-art techniques to check drugs. Writing grad **Stephanie Harrington** delves into their extraordinary work and shares her own personal and painful connection to the raging crisis.

BY STEPHANIE HARRINGTON, MFA '17



The Substance Drug-Checking storefront in downtown Victoria.

Located on the corner of a busy row of shops in Victoria's North Park neighbourhood, Substance Drug Checking's storefront exudes a cheerful, friendly vibe. Five cartoon images resembling the colourful Care Bears, each representing local peer outreach groups, beam smiles from the front window. The slogan, "We take care of us," is painted underneath. Pink paper hearts are pinned around the window's Substance logo, each one etched with handwritten messages from a community art project. Among the faded shapes are photos of loved ones lost to drug poisoning, putting faces to a crisis the scale of which is hard to comprehend. Since opening its storefront at the corner of Cook and North Park nearly two years ago, Substance has become a life-saving service and visible symbol in the fight against toxic-drug poisoning, which is now the leading cause of unnatural death in the province. More than 11,000 people have

died in BC from toxic drugs since April 2016, when the government declared a public-health emergency. That includes a record 2,272 people last year. First Nations and Métis people in BC are disproportionately affected. Across the country, more than 30,000 people have died, and the crisis shows no signs of abating.

That reality has pushed UVic researchers from wide-ranging disciplines such as social work, chemistry, computer science, nursing and public health to work together with people who use drugs and community partners such as SOLID Outreach Society, AVI Health and Community Services, and Island Health to create services and generate research to save lives.

Everyone associated with this crisis has a story of loss, including me. In May 2020, in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, my brother, Ian, died from fentanyl poisoning. He was 39 years old, the second of four siblings, son to Ann and

Bernie, an ironworker, second-generation Irish Canadian, loved by his friends and family and valued by his mixed martial arts community.

Since my brother's death, I've been caught in a push-pull relationship with this crisis, compelled to investigate it but also overwhelmed by the scale of loss. Anything I write cannot convey the grief and pain losing Ian has caused. I grapple with the fact that pandemic restrictions designed to keep us safe created the very conditions that led to his death—social isolation, the closure of health and support services and an increasingly volatile and toxic illicit drug supply.

Every month, I listen to the BC coroner's grim monthly death toll and try to keep hope.

#### UVIC-LED DRUG-CHECKING

It's just before noon, opening time, in mid-March when I walk through Substance's doors. During the pandemic, the team worked at the back of overdose-prevention sites and in hotels, so when SOLID Outreach Society offered the use of the storefront they jumped at the chance.

Harm-reduction worker and social-work alum Kayla Gruntman, BSW '22, stands behind a glass display case that includes pamphlets, naloxone kits and other harm-reduction tools. Behind her, chemistry grad Miriam Sherman, BSc '21, is

hunched over a mail-in sample from Port Alberni, ready to extract a small amount of "down," a term for opioids, to be analyzed. The sample is the size of a matchstick head.

Gruntman explains how Substance's walk-in service works: Clients bring in a small sample of their drug, identify what they think they bought ("down" such as fentanyl, or other common drugs such as cocaine, methamphetamine, or MDMA, commonly known as ecstasy or molly), and leave it with the Substance team. The whole process is anonymous, free and confidential. The client is given a nine-digit code, which they can punch into their phone or online usually within 20 minutes to access the results.

While they wait, a technician will take the sample and mix it with a solvent. The sample is then blotted onto paper and run through the gold-standard of drug-checking instruments, a Paper Spray Mass Spectrometer, a powerful and precise machine that detects chemicals at trace concentrations and quantifies them. The one at Substance was developed by UVic and Vancouver Island University to operate outside of a lab and provide results in real time. To the untrained eye, it resembles a huge printer.

Results include the sample's main active ingredients, fillers or cutting agents, any unexpected drugs, and the presence of fentanyl. Clients can access harm-reduction resources and support services, if they choose. "We don't push sobriety as the only goal," Gruntman says. "We're always trying to make the space



A drug sample being checked using UVic-led technology.

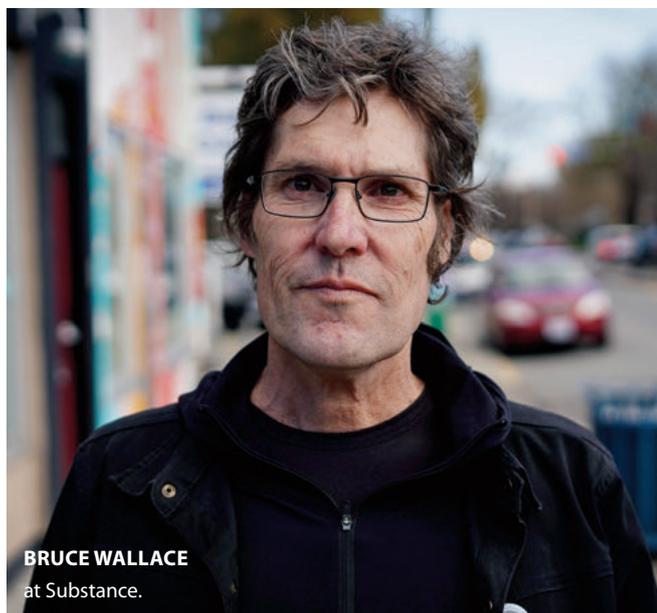
open and safe for everyone. I think we do a pretty great job of being non-judgmental and welcoming.”

The Substance team is busy: their team of 14 staff and students analyzes around 200 samples every week. Led by UVic social-work professor Bruce Wallace and chemistry professor Dennis Hore, Substance started five years ago with funding from Health Canada to develop drug-checking innovations to build on BC’s harm-reduction response. The BC model, as it is commonly called, includes overdose-prevention sites, supervised-consumption sites and take-home naloxone kits to help reverse the effects of an opioid overdose.

Drug checking is becoming part of that model, with portable technology such as Fourier-transform Infrared spectrometers in use at various supervised-consumption sites across the province. The Substance team recently received three years of funding from Island Health to continue offering drug checking with partner sites on Vancouver Island. And BC’s Ministry of Health is providing a grant to the Substance team to look at how they can scale up and implement their drug-checking innovations across the province.

“One of the things our project shows is that UVic has a role,” Wallace says. “We can play a real, significant role to push the response to this public-health emergency.”

At its core, harm-reduction services are based on a respectful relationship between service providers and people who access health and social services. It’s about meeting people where they’re at and helping people—in this case people who use drugs—to minimize negative health, social and legal consequences.



**BRUCE WALLACE**  
at Substance.

Trust plays a big role in drug checking, and Wallace notes that a three-year pilot project in BC to decriminalize small amounts of hard drugs will alleviate some people’s concerns about bringing in substances for checking. (The Controlled Drugs and Substances Act exemption, which runs until 2026, removes criminal penalties for people who possess 2.5 grams or less of certain illicit substances, including cocaine, opioids, methamphetamine and MDMA for personal use.)

“Drug checking is really unique in that we are engaged with the drug way more,” he says. “People have to take the drug out of their pocket and put it in the hands of a UVic student or grad and say, ‘Can you tell me what’s in this?’ There’s a lot of trust needed. There’s a lot of gratitude.”

Wallace, a scientist at UVic’s Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research (CISUR), has worked in inner-city harm reduction for decades. He says Substance provides information to service users so they can make informed decisions.

To help with this goal, the team produces weekly and monthly reports about their testing so people know more about the substances in their region. For example, in February, Substance analyzed 677 samples from across the Island. The median fentanyl concentration found in opioid samples was 9.2 per cent, with a maximum of more than 80 per cent. This information is crucial in an unregulated drug market, where fentanyl concentrations of 2 per cent can kill someone without tolerance.

Although Substance started as a partnership between social work and chemistry at UVic, Wallace says computer science has taken on a crucial role. The Substance team uses machine learning to analyze findings, as well as an app that generates the nine-digit codes, all of which were designed at UVic.

While Paper Spray Mass Spectrometers are used elsewhere in lab settings, Wallace says Substance’s set-up is unique. “We’ve been able to integrate this as a street-level response,” he says. “I don’t know of any other group doing this as a point of care, as you wait, in North America.”

#### BC LEADS WITH PRESCRIBED SAFER SUPPLY

At the time, May 2020 was the worst month in BC’s years-long overdose crisis. That month alone, 173 people in BC died, including my brother. Since then, I’ve watched that number be eclipsed, as the monthly tolls continue to climb higher. I have attended protests demanding an end to this crisis, carrying placards bearing Ian’s name. I’ve attended vigils. I’ve met many others, mothers, siblings, children, friends and colleagues who have lost loved ones. My social-media feed has become a kind of doom-scroll about the crisis. I feel a certain sense of shame that my brother is being remembered mostly for how he died.

Although the pandemic worsened the toxic-drug crisis, it also opened the door to one of the biggest steps in addressing it: prescribed safer supply. BC is the first province to offer prescribed safer supply, formally implementing a Health Canada pilot that ran in three provinces in the first two years of the pandemic to save lives and protect people from contracting COVID-19.

Karen Urbanoski, a Canada Research Chair in Substance Use, Addictions and Health Services at UVic, says BC is the only jurisdiction to roll out the program across the general population, not just at specific shelters or sites, as in other provinces. Urbanoski, along with fellow CISUR scientist and alumna Bernie Pauly, PhD in Nursing '05, are among a consortium of researchers from BC universities evaluating the province's prescribed safer-supply program.

Urbanoski says some 6,500 people in BC accessed safer supply in some way over the first two years. Many of those people lived in cities along the densely populated corridor around Vancouver and southern Vancouver Island.

"That's a small fraction of the people that we know could benefit," says Urbanoski, also an associate professor in the school of public health and social policy. "But I don't know if we would have seen that scale up without COVID."

Rather than engage with the risky illicit-drug market, people enrolled in the prescribed safer-supply program can access safer pharmaceutical alternatives to opioids such as tablet hydromorphone, fentanyl patches or oxycodone. Urbanoski says analyses conducted by study co-lead Bohdan Nosyk and his team at Simon Fraser University have shown that prescribed safer supply protects against mortality.

"In the strictest sense, we could say prescribed safer supply is working if people are still alive because it's not meant to be treatment," she says. "It's different than what has been done before."

Urbanoski and Pauly's research is focused on whether access to prescribed safer supply is improving participants' quality of life and mental health. So far, the answers are complex.

A longitudinal study of 350 participants, which will be extended to another 750 people over coming years, found those factors hadn't changed much in the three-month period Urbanoski's team followed participants. "Maybe that's because it was too short a time period. Maybe more wrap-around services are needed," Urbanoski says. "We're going to continue to look at it."

Another finding was that less than half of participants reported that their dosage was high enough to stop withdrawal. When Pauly, a professor in UVic's school of nursing, conducted more in-depth interviews with participants, she says they reported a better quality of life when the prescription was the right drug and right strength to replace the illicit market. "I heard things like, 'I now have money to purchase food and feel

happy to have food in my fridge.' Or, 'I'm not engaged in criminal activity as much to get substances,'" Pauly says. "It's important to recognize, we're probably saving people's lives when they get a prescription, and when they get the right prescription, we're improving their quality of life."

I remember, in the early days of my grief, hearing about this program and lamenting that it wasn't more widely available. Opioids weren't Ian's drug of choice; he'd struggled with cocaine use for many years. I remember being shocked when the coroner told us that although they found cocaine in his system, he'd died from a lethal dose of fentanyl. We'll never know if he meant to consume fentanyl that night or if his drugs were contaminated. He wanted to quit using, he told me so. But, like so many, he couldn't stop.

I tell Pauly about my brother, and she shares her stories too, of people who can't access prescribed safer supply because they don't have a prescribing doctor or clinic. Of community members who have worked on her research team—and then one day, they're gone.

"These are people from every walk of life. It could be anybody. There's so much stigma and people often hide their use," Pauly says. "Imagine if one drink of alcohol could kill you. That's what we're talking about. You can die from accessing the drug market once."

## MAIL-IN DRUG CHECKING

At Substance, Miriam Sherman, the team's technician on duty, opens her laptop to show me the Paper Spray Mass Spectrometer's analysis of a mail-in sample from Port Alberni. Community partners at Substance's distributed model drug-checking sites in Port Alberni, Comox Valley, Campbell River and Duncan are trained to use portable spectrometers that give preliminary results about a client's drug sample's composition in a few minutes. They can also send the sample through the mail to the North Park's storefront for more detailed information provided by the Paper Spray Mass Spectrometer.

The screen shows a complex graph of red, blue and green lines representing different chemical compounds, including fentanyl, caffeine, sugar and benzodiazepines, the latter of which is added to "down" or prolong the drug's effects. Benzos are a central nervous system depressant that don't respond to naloxone, which has made reviving people who overdose much harder.

Sherman, who is also a paramedic by training, points to the various lines in the graph. "There isn't a lot of fentanyl in it. It looks pretty benzo heavy," she says. "Last week, almost 60 per cent of samples contained benzos. Folks are not only physically dependent on fentanyl but benzos, too."

The graph speaks to the ever-changing nature of the toxic-drug crisis and the imperative for users to have accurate information. “This is nine-times the lethal dose for what we call an opioid-naïve person,” Sherman explains. “With an unregulated supply, when people don’t know what they’re getting, it makes it harder to dose.”

The mail-in option has also opened harm-reduction services to another under-served demographic: men who use alone at home, as my brother did. Since 2016, around three out of four opioid-related deaths were men, with 30 to 50 per cent of those employed working in trades at the time of their death. The mail-in option allows clients to send samples and receive their results online using an anonymous numerical code through Substance’s online portal. I wonder if my brother would have used such a service had he known about it.

Bruce Wallace leans against a doorway and nods as Sherman expertly explains the test results. As he watches the day’s first clients walk through the doors, Wallace says the public-facing store is playing a part in destigmatizing drug use. “People would prefer to live in a world where there is no need for substance-use and mental-health responses. That’s unavoidable though,” he says. “If we can stop viewing substance use as inherently problematic and start accepting substance use as part of society, we could start having services more relevant to people.”

### NO ONE DESERVES TO DIE

A woman we’re calling Kate Neill (protecting her real name for privacy) has experienced first-hand the dangers of the toxic-drug supply. Neill, who is the artist behind Substance’s window art, suffers from degenerative-disc disease, which causes her severe pain. When I meet her at a café near Substance, she arrives on a mobility scooter with her dog, Joey, on her lap. The tiny Shih Tzu is wearing a dog coat that says “Naloxone.”

We talk about her partner, Derek, who died in August from an overdose, just three days after he was released from jail. I can feel her grief at losing him, and she wipes tears from her cheeks as we talk. “I was so happy to have him back. We had plans and now I need to come up with new plans,” she says. “I feel like it’s the stigma that killed him, really.”

Neill is among those accessing BC’s prescribed safer supply. She has just visited the pharmacy for her medication. But while she appreciates having safe access to opioids, the dose isn’t high enough, and Neill turns to the illicit market to treat her debilitating pain. She regularly uses Substance’s services to check the concentration of what she’s consuming and to ensure there are no benzos present. She likens the process to someone wanting to know the strength of alcohol they’re buying. “That’s even

more important if it’s opioids,” she says. “Nobody deserves to die. No one deserves to be in pain, either. There are a lot of reasons why people end up using.”

It’s easy to dehumanize people who use drugs, to paint them as a certain type of person. The reality is everyone is dying in this crisis. Some victims are first-time or recreational users. Some people struggle with their substance use. Some people relapse. I think of my brother. He’d been seeing a drug counselor in the months leading up to his death. He’d applied for a coaching licence to train young people in mixed martial arts. When COVID first hit, he wrapped himself head-to-toe in garbage bags to give a struggling friend a pandemic-friendly hug. From the outside, he seemed to be doing well. Like Derek, he felt ashamed about his drug use and used alone. They didn’t deserve to die.

### STILL LOOKING FOR ANSWERS

We are still so far from ending this crisis, and it is taking a huge toll—on front-line health workers, community groups, researchers, people who use drugs and the people who love them. Not to mention the lost potential of tens of thousands of people who have died. “It’s really awful to be witnessing this, to be where we’re at today, and to know that no one cause got us into this situation,” says Urbanoski.

Decriminalization, says Pauly, doesn’t replace the toxic-drug supply. A limited number of people can access prescribed safe supply. Wait lists and high fees are barriers to treatment and recovery services. And many people don’t have access to drug-checking services like Substance. “The solutions are not to the scale of the problem,” Pauly says.

There are worrying signs the drug-poisoning crisis is becoming increasingly political. The Alberta government, for instance, has been critical of harm-reduction methods. Calling their approach “the Alberta model,” the government is focused on abstinence-based treatment and recovery. Urbanoski, who also studies addictions treatment, says this kind of polarization is incredibly harmful. “People forget... harm reduction is going to be more effective to the extent treatment is available and treatment is going to be more effective if there is harm reduction available,” she says.

Or, as Pauly puts it, bluntly: “Treatment works best when people are ready. When they’re not ready, we need to make sure they don’t die.”

What governments cannot do is stop the demand for opioids. UVic researchers say the missing piece is widely accessible safer supply. Providing safer supply through the medical system is one option. Community programs, such as compassion clubs, used in the past for medical cannabis, or a buyers’ club, which helped

HIV/AIDS patients access medication in the mid-80's, are possible alternatives to the toxic illicit supply. "There's a range of possibilities for what we can do," Pauly says.

Leaving Substance that day, I can feel the grief in my bones. As I write this story, I am aware that the anniversary of my brother's death is approaching. I'll be with my family that day. We will celebrate Ian and grieve him at his favourite beach. I'll run up the sandhill where he used to train and look out at the Salish Sea, a view he loved. I'll think of people who have died in the same way. And I'll try to imagine a future where others don't have to mark such an occasion. †

Watch a video on Substance Drug Checking at [alumni.uvic.ca](http://alumni.uvic.ca).



**STEPHANIE HARRINGTON**  
with her brother, Ian.

# We're better, together.



Comprehensive coverage. Superior value.

Term Life Insurance | Dependent Children Term Life Insurance | Accidental Death & Dismemberment Insurance  
Critical Illness Insurance | Travel Insurance | Health & Dental Insurance

**University of Victoria Personal Insurance Program**

**For a personalized quotation or to apply online, please visit us at:**

[specialmarkets.ia.ca/uvic](http://specialmarkets.ia.ca/uvic)

1.800.266.5667



Underwritten by Industrial Alliance Insurance and Financial Services Inc.  
iA Financial Group is a business name and trademark of Industrial Alliance Insurance and Financial Services Inc.

# Strength in Language

**Belinda kakiyosēw Daniels**, assistant professor in the Department of Indigenous Education at UVic, is teaching the next generation of nehiyawewin (Cree) language keepers as a way to reclaim nationhood.

BY MICHELLE BUTTERFIELD, BCOM '14



DR. BELINDA KAKIYOSĒW DANIELS,  
pictured along the South Saskatchewan  
in saskatōn-minatōnik askiy.

**D**r. Belinda kakiyosēw (*KAH-GUY-YO-SEE-YO*) Daniels found her life's work through a journey that began with a childhood dream. The nēhiyawēwin (Cree) language spirit chose her for the field of Indigenous Language Revitalization (ILR), or "languages standing up for themselves," as she says. "It was the language spirit that chose me to be a rescuer. I remember a dream I had when I was about 10 years old: I was laying on my belly on my grandmother's kitchen floor, playing with an old silver hand mirror. I was imagining what the world was like on the other side of this mirror, and I was actually transported through the mirror," she recalls.

"In the place I landed, there were thick trees and a huge mountain. I looked up and saw etchings on the mountain's rock wall. I ran my hand over the etchings. I didn't know it then, but I believe those to have been ancient spirit markers, petroglyphs of the Cree language."

Daniels, a member of the Sturgeon Lake First Nation, SK, is now a celebrated educator, collaborative researcher and community leader. She is also a mother, grandmother and reclaiming of her mother tongue. She teaches ILR as an assistant professor in UVic's Faculty of Education and leads the nēhiyawak language experience, a non-profit organization that offers immersive, land-based summer language learning camps on Treaty 6 territory also known as Saskatchewan. Her mission is to reclaim sovereignty and nationhood through the Cree language.

## IMMERSIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING

After learning and teaching Cree grammar in classroom settings for years, Daniels became uninspired by the western curriculum. Intuitively, she began exploring ways of unlearning and unraveling western ways of thinking. In 2003, she started planning for her first immersive Cree summer camp where attendees could come to learn and practice speaking the language.

The concept of her immersive-language camps has resonated well with communities across Canada; the number of participants continues to grow each year as awareness and demand increases. The core experience is a week-long, immersive summer program with a focus on introducing students to a variety of language-learning methods. By the end, most can confidently introduce themselves, engage in basic conversation and tell a short story in Cree.

"Immersion is the best practice in reclaiming our Indigenous languages. In the language, we learn our laws, our roles, our history and our connection to the land. We remember our treaties with the animals, the lakes, the sun and the sky. We learn the stories of where we come from and where we will return to after we leave our bodies as vessels. We find where we belong in this world. This is why it's so important and that we have our own ways of learning and teaching languages. It is time to privilege that."

## CONNECTIONS AND COLLABORATION

Over the years, Daniels has led and participated in hundreds of language classes, collaborated with other researchers, been honoured with several awards and celebrated by her peers. In 2022, a life-sized portrait of Daniels was created by renowned Canadian visual artist Kent Monkman and included in their exhibition "Being Legendary" at the Royal Ontario Museum.

She points to the strong connections she's made with others as a key factor in her work's remarkable ripple effect. She has maintained relationships with her favourite professors and colleagues, who later became good friends. "I really admire people who are very kind and compassionate and consistent." She shares this advice: "Connect with other human beings and to people who look up to you. Continue to guide and show the way to make this world a better place." †

# Emergency Contact

Humanities grad **Erin Stockill** built upon skills gained at UVic to become a key player in emergency management and preparedness for the District of Saanich, helping people on what could be “the worst day of their lives.”

BY PHILIP COX



ERIN STOCKILL at the District of Saanich firehall.

**W**hen a construction crew accidentally struck an unmarked gas line running beneath a southern Saanich road last January, the emergency response from the municipality was swift: within the hour, electricity to the area was cut, a small residential fire was extinguished, and occupants of the neighboring elementary school, residences and apartment buildings were evacuated to a temporary comfort centre set up nearby. With no injuries reported and the gas line repaired, order was restored within the span of four hours. For Erin Stockill, BA '13, days like this are just another part of her job as Emergency Program Officer for the District of Saanich. “On that day, I was greeting the evacuees from the apartment buildings and directing them to the comfort centre, where they kept warm until it was determined that it was safe for them to go back home,” Stockill says. “It’s really cool to be a part of the team of first-responder agencies working together in an emergency to minimize its impact on the community. It’s like... heck yeah! That’s my job! It’s pretty neat.”

In her role, she provides professional technical support for the development and implementation of emergency mitigation,

preparedness, response and recovery plans and programs and initiatives for municipal departments, staff and the community. One shift, she might show the public how to build an emergency kit, the next she might train a team of Emergency Support Services volunteers.

The path that led Stockill to the job she loves included her degree in English. “My degree at UVic really gave me fundamental communication skills that have allowed me to excel in my career,” she reflects. “Right now, I oversee and communicate regularly with more than 100 volunteers and staff. I write reports for the highest offices in local government and collaborate with community partners at federal, provincial and regional levels. I just wouldn’t be in this position without my English degree.”

Throughout her undergrad, Stockill was unclear about what she would do after graduation. An interest in writing led her to major in English; a need for money led her to work part-time in family and child care for the District of Oak Bay.

Ultimately, it was an underlying desire to serve the community that led her to join the Saanich Police Department as a reserve constable—a program of uniformed, trained volunteers who support the district’s community policing and crime-prevention efforts.

After being promoted to Sergeant in her fourth year and then continuing in the role for another two more, Stockill had enough of a taste of emergency response to know this was her calling. An administrative position as a Fire Clerk with the District of Oak Bay came up, which at first seemed like a step in the right direction, but the memories from her time in the reserves left Stockill missing the front-line experience.

“I wanted to do more,” she recalls. “I was supporting people who were helping others, but I started to feel like I was stuck at the department. I wanted to be one of the hands and boots on the ground.”

Bolstered by support and mentorship from Oak Bay’s fire chief, Stockill then began a certificate program through the Justice Institute of BC to pursue a career in emergency management. “Because of the work I did at UVic, the certificate in emergency management was very attainable, even while I was working full time. I was able to leap-frog through the program into my current role,” she reflects. †

# Putting Responders First

UVic professor and alumna **Lynne Stuart-Hill** and graduate student **Thomas Service** are studying ways to protect emergency personnel from harms they face on the job.

BY JENNY MANZER, BA '97 • PHOTOS BY MICHAEL KISSINGER, BEd '94



**THOMAS SERVICE** monitors a firefighter as he exercises in full gear on a treadmill in a lab at UVic's McKinnon building.

In the studies, firefighters take a core-temperature capsule that transmits through Bluetooth to a monitor.



It was, as they say, only a drill—but it turned into a revelation. During one of her first occupational physiology studies, Lynne Stuart-Hill and her team had set up a simulated car crash outside Victoria High School. They'd recruited people to play victims, students would serve as onlookers—and the city's media would report on location. All the elements were designed to ramp up pressure on the firefighters, who would be responding to their most stressful call—extracting people from a vehicle. At the start of their shifts, the firefighters ingested core-temperature capsules and were given monitors. Almost as an afterthought, Stuart-Hill also placed monitors on the incident commanders—the leaders who control the scene and give orders. Her main focus was the responders doing the physical work of rushing to save lives within “the golden hour.” But what she found surprised her. The incident commanders showed the strongest physical response to stress.

“What we saw was that their stress response was even higher than the ones who were actually trying to work the jaws of life... Their heart rates were higher, their blood pressures were higher, everything else, so realizing that the stress of incident command, more of a psychological stress, was really manifesting itself physically in these individuals.”

Stuart-Hill notes that emergency responders are more vulnerable to heart attack than the rest of the population—and stress may be a culprit. “It was just really eye opening to me to see the impact of psychological stress manifesting itself physically,” says Stuart-Hill, who earned a Bachelor of Science in Human Performance at UVic, then a Master of Science in Physical Education, followed by a PhD at UBC.

The findings from the drill that day in 2002 launched an “aha moment” for Stuart-Hill and set her on her research path. She saw the potential for discovery, but also for helping to improve the lives of first responders. She's now worked with several occupations, including police, fire, conservation officers and both wildland and structural firefighters. One of her graduate students, Marissa Harrington, planned to investigate the stress of nurses on the job—which became a study of nursing during the pandemic. The nurses kept logs noting high-stress incidents, wore monitoring equipment and had stress markers (such as cortisol) heart rate and sleep patterns measured. Harrington's work also showed stress had a physiological effect.

Stuart-Hill says we need to reconsider these professions that we rely on to keep us safe and healthy. “We have to remember first and foremost that they are humans as well. They have some

really unique vulnerabilities in their jobs. One is certainly the psychological component, because they can see some really horrific things. The PTSD and the stress, we're definitely seeing it in the nurses."

UVic researchers also see these patterns in their work with firefighters, who are under unique stresses, including both shift work and environmental stresses. The nature of the work is also changing. For example, wildland firefighting used to be seasonal—now, due to climate change—the work is year 'round.

"The fatigue and the burnout that we're starting to see in some of these emergency-responder occupations, whether it's emergency response to help people, the environment, or both—it's having a huge toll on these individuals."

The results from the staged scene at Vic High in 2002 launched a series of studies for Stuart-Hill. Later, after a volunteer firefighter died from a cardiac incident at a training facility in Comox, Stuart-Hill started investigating heat and inflammation. She wanted to know how rapidly firefighters gain heat in their "turnout gear," the heavy, protective clothing they wear at the scene, and how long it takes to dissipate.

Structural firefighters are much more vulnerable to cardiovascular incidents than the general public, says Stuart-Hill. "We have never really known why. They suffer heart attacks two times more often than police and four times more often than paramedics, even though they all do shift work."

Researcher Thomas Service knows firsthand how hot wearing that turnout gear can get. He's a long-time volunteer fire-

fighter with North Saanich Fire Department. Previous studies have shown that when the firefighters become hot in their turnout gear, it starts an inflammatory response in the body and some of those inflammatory proteins have been implicated in atherosclerosis.

Service is leading a double-blind clinical trial of 12 to 15 subjects that involves giving firefighters a placebo at one visit and an anti-inflammatory another time to see if the drug mitigates that response. The firefighters take core-temperature capsules that transmit through blue tooth to a monitor. The subjects exercise in their gear on a treadmill until they reach either 39.5 degrees or physical exhaustion. They are given the antihistamines proactively before they go on the treadmill to see if it will decrease the inflammatory response. If the antihistamines work, it would be a simple way to offset the deleterious effects of heat inflammation.

"It's really good, that gear, at protecting you from the external heat of a fire," Service says. However, the flip side is that it's really good at storing the body heat that you produce. When we break down ATP [Adenosine triphosphate] to provide the energy for movement, the muscles are not 100 per cent efficient in the conversion, and this produces heat. The more heat that we produce with the work we are doing—and when there's not really anywhere for that heat to go because of the properties of the gear—the hotter we get. If it doesn't allow heat in, it's not going to allow heat out."

Part of the reason Service chose to continue his studies at UVic—earning a degree in biology, then a Master of Science in Kinesiology and a graduate certificate—is to avoid having to leave his post as a volunteer firefighter and give up his close connections to the community.

"It's almost like a second family in a sense. When you're there long enough it's hard to do something that would pull you away from it. I really enjoy it," says Service.

Stuart-Hill, for her part, says she avoids the term work-life balance—it should all be life balance, with work fitting within your life, she insists. Although she is devoted to her work, she makes lots of time for pickleball, golf, gardening, walking her two golden retrievers and exercising.

"That's definitely something that this research has shown me. What you do in your job and what you take home with you is going to affect all the rest of your life." †



Researcher and alumnus  
**THOMAS SERVICE.**

# Saving Sight

University of Victoria alumna **Bridget Ryan** and biology professor **Bob Chow** are working on a gene therapy to halt the progression of Stargardt disease, which causes blindness, often beginning in childhood.

BY MARK WITTEN

**A**s a scientist who is a visual artist, Bridget Ryan, BSc'12, PhD '22, uses the compelling image of plastic strewn on a beach to illustrate what happens in the retinas of children with Stargardt disease. Imagine a world where recycling doesn't work, where plastic is accumulating in the environment because it's failing to be reused. If the plastic isn't recycled, it creates toxic trash that pollutes and eventually harms the environment. "A similar process occurs at the molecular level in Stargardt disease, where the waste from an essential vision molecule isn't recycled properly and toxic trash accumulates. This leads to damage and irreversible death of the light-sensitive cells in the retina, causing blindness," says Ryan, a UVic postdoctoral fellow who is working with UVic biology professor Bob Chow on a therapy for this incurable genetic disease.

Her analogy was at the heart of their winning pitch, "Help us rescue the retina from toxic trash in Stargardt disease," in a televised *Dragon's Den*-style research funding competition held in November. Ryan and Chow won the \$50,000 top prize in Fighting Blindness Canada's second annual "Eye on the Cure" competition to help fund their proposed genetic-rescue experiment to test whether blocking production of a specific protein in the innate immune system—known as complement factor D—could halt disease progression.

## SAVING SIGHT BY CURBING INFLAMMATION

"I came up with the single-use plastic analogy for our pitch because I was trying to explain to my husband, a software engineer, what I was doing in my research to help find a cure for this disease," says Ryan, who did her PhD in Chow's lab studying a gene called *PAX6* that is important for development of the eye, retina, and brain, and aniridia, an inherited eye disease caused by a *PAX6* mutation.

"The immune system's inflammatory response to the buildup of toxic trash in retinal cells is thought to contribute to vision loss in Stargardt disease. Our rescue experiment involves removing a key component of the immune system's inflammatory response, which could potentially prevent death of the light-sensing cells in the retina."

Stargardt disease is an inherited retinal condition, which causes progressive vision loss and affects about 1 in 10,000 people. Vision loss typically begins during childhood or adolescence, with symptoms similar to age-related macular degeneration (AMD). The disease is usually caused by mutations in a different gene, *ABCA4*, and as a result, cells are unable to recycle a waste product of normal vision in the eye, which causes toxic trash, called lipofuscin, to build up, damage to photoreceptors and eventually leads to central vision loss.

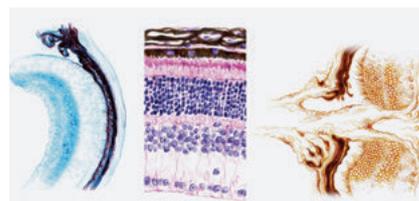
Ryan's mentor, Chow, is a specialist in vision research and genes involved in diseases of the retina, who uses mouse models to better understand and develop new therapeutic approaches to eye disease. As a PhD student in his lab, Ryan developed expertise in designing experiments with mice genetically engineered to mimic human inherited eye diseases. In their ingenious genetic rescue experiment—designed to show a genetic problem can be successfully treated with a genetic solution—she bred one group of mice (with the *ABCA4* gene mutation) comparable to people with



Researcher and alumna **BRIDGET RYAN**



UVic biology professor **BOB CHOW**



Sketch of the retina by Bridget Ryan.

Stargardt disease and a second group of mice with the Stargardt mutation and another genetic mutation that disrupts production of complement factor D.

Ryan and Chow will be looking in the coming months to see whether the mice who don't make complement factor D are protected against hallmark features of the disease. "We'll be measuring the accumulation of toxic trash in cells of the eye to see if there is less buildup and whether light-sensitive cells in the retina are dying. Ultimately, we'll be observing the mice to see if normal vision is rescued," says Ryan. "If this short-term experiment shows that blocking complement factor D stops or slows disease progression, that will provide proof-of-principle to guide our long-term aim of developing a gene-therapy approach to preserve vision in patients with Stargardt disease."

#### THE POWER OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Ryan's interest in neuroscience and vision research was fuelled by two pivotal experiences she had as an undergraduate in biology at UVic. "I used to do competitive downhill skiing, with a lot of moguls and jumps, and had a few concussions that landed me in hospital. My personal experience with and struggles to recover from several disabling, traumatic brain injuries led me to an interest in neuroscience. I wanted to understand what was happening when I experienced things like seizures and depression," she recalls.

Ryan was also interested in scientific illustration and keen to build a portfolio. While taking Chow's course in developmental biology, Ryan asked if she could drop by his lab to draw tissue sections of the eye and retina under the microscope. "I was amazed. The images generated by the confocal microscope are stunningly beautiful. I began coming to the lab regularly to do drawings and paintings of tissue specimens. Bob talked about his vision research and it fascinated me," says Ryan, who dove in by doing an honours research project on regulation of the PAX6 gene under Chow's supervision.

Today, Ryan continues to create elegant illustrations of retinal-tissue specimens from their vision research.

#### THE PROMISE OF GENE THERAPY TO RESCUE VISION

Ryan and Chow are seeking definitive answers to key questions about the role of the immune system in Stargardt disease, which



"A Forest of Neurons:" Pencil on paper by Bridget Ryan. "These are a type of neuron found in the mature retina called bipolar cells, which are an important component in the neural circuits involved in vision," says Ryan.

have been theorized but not yet proven. "If our experiment shows that deactivating complement factor D

blocks the inflammatory response and rescues vision in Stargardt mice, we plan to test a gene-therapy approach. We would design and insert a gene into the eye that makes a neutralizing antibody against complement factor D," explains Ryan, noting that gene therapy has been shown in clinical trials to restore some vision in patients with Leber congenital amaurosis, an inherited retinal disorder. "Our research may also help people suffering from dry age-related macular degeneration, which shares many similarities with Stargardt disease and affects about 2.5 million Canadians."

Ryan was first drawn to vision research by doing illustrations and paintings of the light-sensitive tissues in the eye. As an artist and a scientist who relies on her eyes to decipher the images and data seen through a microscope, she has a deep commitment to restoring the sense that is lost in blinding diseases.

"I'm a very curious person and enjoy doing basic science research in the lab. But it's especially rewarding to do work that will be useful to the field of vision loss, which could potentially benefit patients with Stargardt disease and AMD—and society." †

# Diamond in the Rough

A degree in Theatre set the stage for **Emily Bailey's** work as a certified mine rescuer in BC's north and as a member of **Diamonds in the Rough**, an all-female rescue team.

BY JOHN THRELFALL, BA '96

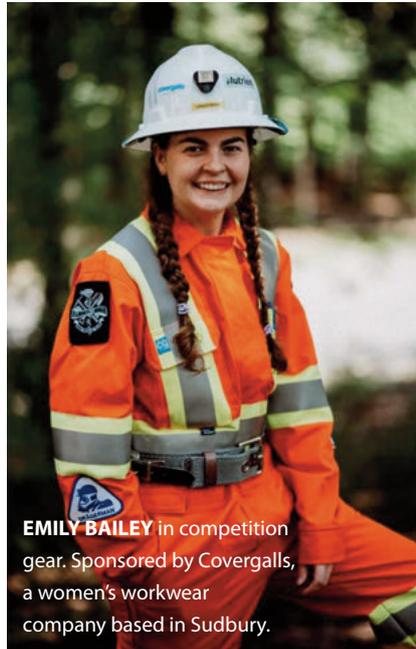
As anyone who has suffered the slings and arrows of a theatrical life knows, working on stage can be a risky business. But Theatre grad Emily Bailey (née Lindstrom, BFA '19) has taken her production-management experience in a new direction by putting herself into situations more perilous than a bad review. Not only is she the co-chief of her local volunteer fire department, but she's also a certified mine rescuer and member of the Diamonds in the Rough, Canada's all-female, internationally competitive, mine-rescue team. "One of my professors once told me that a degree in theatre is a degree in team organization and creative problem-solving," says Bailey. "I think that's the best way to describe how I've adapted my fine-arts skills into the industrial world."

Growing up in the small BC industry town of Fraser Lake, Bailey worked in a sawmill for three summers before enrolling in theatre at UVic—a surprise to many, as she recalls. "I was a jock in high school, but what I loved most about sports was the organization of teams and tournaments and events," she says. "I wanted a career doing that."

Bailey found her niche behind the scenes in production management at UVic's Phoenix Theatre. "I realized this was totally where I was supposed to be and knew I'd made the right choice." And it was those very organizational and problem-solving skills that got her hired as a stage manager in Barkerville Historic Town, BC's legendary 1860s gold-rush heritage site.

Today, Bailey lives just 10 minutes down the road in Wells—the site of its own 1930s gold rush. But it's also the centre of the current Cariboo mining renaissance thanks to her employer—Osisko Development, Cariboo Gold Project—where she was hired as health and safety coordinator at the end of 2019. "They saw value in my background, which was surprising but also kind of cool," she says.

If the idea of gold mining conjures up images of Bugs Bunny-style mine shafts with rail tracks and ore carts, you're about a hundred years out of date. "Mining today is very different... it's a



**EMILY BAILEY** in competition gear. Sponsored by Covergalls, a women's workwear company based in Sudbury.

lot bigger than you'd expect for being underground," Bailey explains. "A pick-up truck fits really comfortably into a mine drift, with room above and beside you. Our mine entrance is basically a road with a small incline—you can walk out of it at any point if you need to, which is a big comfort to my parents."

The outbreak of the pandemic in early 2020 meant she could put her skills to good use. "COVID-19 hit about four months after I was hired and, with my organizational and first-aid skills, I began to head the screening and management section of our health and safety department," she recalls. As well as monitoring potential exposures, Bailey focused on workplace injuries ("equipment failure, sore backs, broken legs, an amputated toe") more than the widely known mining risks such as gas exposure

or cave-ins.

"We're an hour away from the nearest hospital, so critical-injury care is really important if something does happen," she says. "But mine rescue is also a huge component of what we do. I took my entry-level mine rescue course in 2020, which covers the basics of rescue gear and techniques—but it doesn't stop there: we continue training monthly with our company."

It was during one of those training sessions that Bailey first learned about the Diamonds in the Rough (DITR) Emergency Rescue Organization. "During the course, I found myself getting increasingly sassy with the instructor, because all of his material had photos of men, he used all-male pronouns and I was the only woman in the class." Sensing her frustration, the instructor mentioned that his company sponsored an all-female competitive team, Diamonds in the Rough. She researched to learn more.

Founded in 2016, DITR started as an effort to both raise the profile of women in the mining industry and in non-traditional roles through underground mine rescue. DITR challenges the traditionally male-dominated environment by competing at an international level.

“We compete in a variety of areas, including mine simulation, high-angle rescue, first aid, firefighting and BG4 [breathing apparatus] technician and theory,” says Bailey. “Our team is made up of women from across Canada... which means that the rescue regulations for each jurisdiction may be slightly different.”

While some international mine-rescue teams train together for years, Bailey had never met her other DTR team members and had just four days to train before her first competition in West Virginia in 2022. “It was quite the learning curve,” she recalls. “We all work in different types of mines—gold, hard rock, pot ash—and all have different professions—engineers, technicians, health and safety—yet we had to learn the same mining language and match up our training strength and weaknesses.”

The pressure resulted in a dazzling performance: Bailey’s team came in sixth out of 22 teams, earning a second place in high-angle rescue and third in technician and theory. “The [hosts] said we were one of the best training experiences they’d ever had,” she says. “It was an amazing experience!”

Even more surprising for Bailey was the competition’s similarity to the theatrical world. “Since no one’s life is on the line, it’s really just for fun—but they try to make it look as realistic as possible.” Cue the lighting effects, smoke machines, set-dressing, fake blood and actors as victims. “It really cracked me up: I’m a stage manager in the mining world! It was cool to realize that my role and skill sets could transfer over.”

Winning competitions is all well and good, but the Diamonds in the Rough also have a role to play when it comes to challenging gender expectations. “When you’re a female in mining and mine rescue, it’s always about more than just doing your job,” she points out. “It’s also about proving you deserve to be there. Miners need to have trust and confidence in you: they need to have no doubt in their minds that you’re there to help.” Fortu-

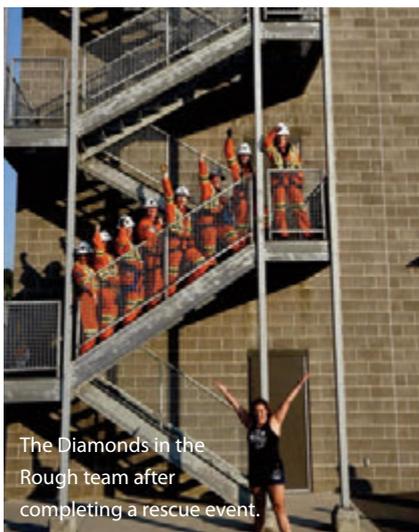
nately, she feels those attitudes are changing, albeit slowly.

“In Canada, it was illegal for women to work underground until the 1970s and, for some of the international teams we compete against, it’s still illegal for women to work in the mines or even be on the mine site,” she says. “Just like sailors have superstitions about women on boats, miners have the same kind of superstitions... we had groups who were so excited that we were there and others who wanted nothing to do with us.”

For Bailey, mining is more than just her day job and competitive pastime: it’s also quite literally the world in which she lives. The house she shares with her actor husband Brendan Bailey—who portrays a historic miner in nearby Barkerville—was originally built for a mine superintendent in the 1930s, and she’s working for the company that’s on the precipice of another potential Cariboo mining boom.

“When you live in Wells, you’re not just living in any town—you’re part of a town that was built by mining,” she says. Together with her husband, she shares the role of co-chief of the Wells Volunteer Fire Brigade, with emergency calls mostly involving vehicle incidents and house fires.

“Given where we live, it’s more about having a helping spirit, being ready and willing to help out,” she concludes. “I’d rather be competent and be able to help than be caught in an emergency situation and be helpless.” †



The Diamonds in the Rough team after completing a rescue event.



Training before the competition with the West Virginia University mining extension team in West Virginia.

## DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARDS

# Celebrating the 2023 Distinguished Alumni Awards

Recipients were honoured at a downtown Victoria reception in April.



2023 DAA recipients (from left to right): **LEIGH JOSEPH/STYAWAT, DEBRA DANCO, JULIE CLAVEAU, MOUSSA MAGASSA, LEENA YOUSEFI, LAWRENCE LEWIS, TAIWO AFOLABI, MICHAEL DUNN, SARAH JIM and KEAR PORTTRIS.**

In April, the University of Victoria community came out to celebrate the recipients of this year's UVic Distinguished Alumni Awards (DAA) at a lively reception held at Victoria's Hotel Grand Pacific. Ten of the 16 recipients were able to attend the event in person. There were toasts, photo ops, a few short speeches and

lots of reconnecting and rubbing elbows. Congratulations to this year's inspiring recipients. To read more about them, watch a video or nominate someone for next year's Distinguished Alumni Awards, go to [uvic.ca/distinguished-alumni](http://uvic.ca/distinguished-alumni).

### PRESIDENTS' ALUMNI AWARDS

Julie Claveau, BSc '09  
Michael Dunn, BA '74  
Gargee Ghosh, BA '97  
Maureen Gruben, BFA '12  
Lisa Helps, BA '02, MA '05  
Leena Yousefi, BA'06, JD '10

### INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY ALUMNI AWARDS

Denise Augustine, BEd '90  
Leigh Joseph/Styawat, BSc '10, MSc '12  
Lawrence Lewis, BA '93, Dipl '98  
Art Napoleon, GCert '13, MA '15

### EMERGING ALUMNI AWARDS

Taiwo Afolabi, PhD '20  
Debra Danco, JD '13  
Sarah Jim, BFA '19  
Josh Lovell, BMus '15  
Moussa Magassa, GCert '17, PhD '20  
Kear Porttrris, BEng '17, MAsc '21



Emerging Alumni Award recipient **DEBRA DANCO**.



Left to right: UVic President Kevin Hall with DAA recipients **JULIE CLAVEAU** and **LAWRENCE LEWIS**.



Emerging Alumni Award recipient **KEAR PORTTRIS** (centre) with UVic Chancellor and alumna Marion Buller (right).



Presidents' Alumni Award recipient **MICHAEL DUNN** (third from left).



Emerging Alumni Award recipient **MOUSSA MAGASSA** (right).



Presidents' Alumni Award recipient **LEENA YOUSEFI**.



Indigenous Community Alumni Award recipient **LEIGH JOSEPH/STYAWAT**.



Emerging Alumni Award recipient **SARAH JIM** (left).



Emerging Alumni Award recipient **TAIWO AFOLABI** (right) with Director of Alumni Relations Gina Wheatcroft.

# YOU HAVE EXPERIENCE. THEY HAVE ENTHUSIASM.

You remember the feeling.  
A mind full of fresh ideas but  
no industry experience, yet.

Help them bridge the gap  
between the classroom  
and the workplace.

Hire a UVic co-op  
student today.

LEARN MORE



UVic alum Kat Craats (right)  
mentors a co-op student  
on site at Wildplay Element  
Parks zipline course.

[uvic.ca/hireacoop](http://uvic.ca/hireacoop)

# UVIC



# A Kind Word for Social Workers

Social worker **Amy Pinnell** left public service to start her own business, sharing messages and products to ease the load of her colleagues in the field.



Entrepreneur and social worker  
**AMY PINNELL**

## We profile UVic alumni who recently made a bold life change.

**Name:** Amy Pinnell, MSW '16, RSW

**Age:** I am 33 years young.

**Hometown:** I was born in Halifax, NS, and spent most of my childhood and youth in Fall River, NS. I moved to Victoria to complete my Master's and ended up sticking around for nine years. I moved back to the East Coast in 2022 and currently reside in Truro, NS.

**UVic degree and year:** Master of Social Work from UVic in 2016.

**What I used to be:** A substance-use counsellor with an addiction outpatient treatment program at Island Health.

**Then I had the idea to:** Offer the same kindness, support and compassion to social workers that they give to everyone else. I started off posting messages to social workers on an Instagram account (@sensitivesocialworker) and eventually made these into the "Love Notes for Social Workers—Card Deck." The card deck is a

collection of 34 compassionate and supportive messages for the hard-working social worker who gives so much to others, they sometimes forget to take care of themselves.

Since its launch in September 2022, social workers have been using this card deck as part of their daily self-care practice, to start their staff meeting and as a tool in clinical supervision.

**Why I did it:** Social workers are a passionate and social justice-oriented bunch. They care a lot about people and society as a whole. But often, the workplace culture normalizes overworking, chronic stress and burnout—which simply did not work for my Highly Sensitive nature. As I found ways to stay well in the field, I wanted to share the messages and beliefs that helped me in case other social workers found value in them.

**How I did it:** One step at a time! My card deck, website and shipping process were all created during my transition from Victoria to Truro. I knew I wanted to get this card deck out into the world, so I just focused on one manageable step at a time.

**What I love about my new life:** I love leaning into my creative side. Through writing and sketching, I have found my voice and created something I wholeheartedly believe in! As a Highly Sensitive Person, creating a schedule that suits my needs has been life-changing and beneficial to my mental health.

**What I miss about my old life:** I miss working on a team and having colleagues I can easily go to when needing to run an idea off someone or if I'm feeling stuck. I also miss the consistency of the pay cheque.

**One lesson learned:** If you want to put yourself out there and try something new, you're going to have to do it scared and imperfect.



**One person who helped me:** I've had a number of cheerleaders along the way. Of course, my partner, Matt, was one of the biggest. He believed in me from the start and continued to even when my confidence wavered.

**One trade secret:** I started building a community, creating free content that served them and nurturing relationships with fellow social workers before I even considered making and selling a product.

**You can find me:** Offering virtual therapy for my private practice, Brave Spirit Counselling (bravespirit.ca) and packing up card deck orders for Sensitive Social Worker (sensitivesocialworker.com). †

# CONTINUING STUDIES @UVIC



## the credentials you need... WITHIN REACH

When you need to respond to a quickly changing job market or get back into the workforce, micro-credentials offer a fast and flexible way to upskill or reskill and remain competitive in your industry.

With 20+ micro-credential programs to choose from, we'll help you get to where you need to be—and quickly!

[BROWSE PROGRAMS](#)

[continuingstudies.uvic.ca/  
micro-credentials](https://continuingstudies.uvic.ca/micro-credentials)



## Generosity is timeless.

Jamie Chung believed in helping others. This lesson and many others were passed down from her mother and carried her through many difficult times. It inspired her to establish the Betty Jamie Chung Scholarship at UVic. Today, 45 alumni can thank Jamie for paying it forward with a gift in her Will.



[LEARN MORE](#)

## What legacy will you leave?

Find out how you can support UVic students through a gift in your Will:

Greg Kuhn, Development Officer, Legacy Giving  
250-721-6001 | [legacydev@uvic.ca](mailto:legacydev@uvic.ca)



[uvic.ca/legacygiving](https://uvic.ca/legacygiving)

# Class Notes

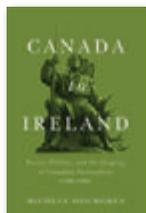
## News and photos from around the alumni world

### 1950s

Alumna **PATRICIA “TRISH” GRAY**, Vic College '54, has written the children's book *Granny Tails*, published by Tellwell Talent and illustrated by Chelsea Noyon.

### 1970s

**PATRICK WOLFE**, BA in History '73, has published *A Snake on the Heart—History, Mystery, and Truth: The Entangled Journeys of a Biographer and his Nazi Subject*, with Iguana Books of Toronto.



### 1980s

**MICHELE HOLMGREN**, who graduated with an Honours English

degree in 1988, published a literary history of the Irish in Canada, *Canada to Ireland: Poetry, Politics, and the Shaping of Canadian Nationalism*, with McGill-Queen's University Press. The 2021 book received an honourable mention for the Roberts Rhodes Prize, sponsored by the American Conference of Irish Studies, and was runner-up for the Gabrielle Roy Prize for books on literature, sponsored by the Association for Canada and Quebec Literatures. Holmgren is currently an associate professor in the English, Languages and Culture Department at Mount Royal University in Calgary.

UVic Fine Arts graduate **ERIK CHEUNG**, BFA '88, who uses the

name Kire for his artistic endeavours, recently exhibited at Art Vancouver 2023 at the Convention Centre, a highlight in a long career. Kire was juried into the North Park Gallery exhibition in Victoria upon graduation. He relocated and taught for 20 years in Hong Kong. During that time,



**“Empress” by Kire**

he experimented with calligraphy, both Chinese and Western, and the various disciplines of designs, installation art and other art forms.

Kire now lives in Edmonton. He received the 150 in 150 award in the visual-arts category in 2017 and received a Canada Council of the Arts grant. His works have been sold to private collectors in the US, Canada, England and Hong Kong over the years.

### 1990s

UVic Writing major **KATY. E. ELLIS**, BA '95, has released her first-novel length prose poem via Tolsun Books. *Home Water, Home Land* is set mostly on Vancouver Island with many crossings into Washington State. The hybrid



**KATY E. ELLIS**

narrative explores the interior landscape and transitions a young woman must navigate to break away from her family's patriarchal belief system so that she can find, or become, her own saviour. More info at [katieellis.com](http://katieellis.com).

**W. PAUL LOOFS**, Cert '94, Dipl '96 in Applied Linguistics, has (after a COVID-related delay) released the third and final edition of his book *In His Hands: True Stories of Wondrous Events in an Unusual Life*. Loofs is now 93 and did his post-graduate studies in retirement. From the blurb on Amazon: “Wolfgang Paul Loofs was born in Germany in 1929 and lived through the Third Reich



period and World War Two, escaping from the Soviet Occupation Zone after graduating in Leipzig in 1947. After four years in Europe, he emigrated to Canada and had two careers: 20 years in the mining industry, during which he made three around-the-world trips by VW Beetle, and another 20 years with the federal government as a translator/revisioner.”

Leadership Victoria honoured **MARY-ANNE NEAL**, MEd '99, with a Leadership Victoria Award for her contributions to lifelong learning. Neal started teaching in Alberta in 1972 and continues to share her expertise as an independent educational consultant throughout Canada and abroad. She launched the Dene Hero publication project with remote Indigenous



**MARY-ANNE NEAL**

communities and has published five books written by Indigenous people aged 10 to 82 years old. Neal's 2021 memoir, *Under the Midnight Sun: Journey with the Sahtu Dene*, has sold almost 5,000 copies.

**KELLI STAJDUHAR**, BSN '90, was named a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada last year. A professor in UVic's School of Nursing and a research fellow at the Institute on Aging and Lifelong Health at UVic, Stajduhar is also a Tier 1 Canada Research Chair on Palliative Approaches to Care in Aging and Community Health.

### 2000s

Filmmaker and UVic creative writing grad **SEAN HORLOR**, BFA '04, has a new documentary that's been demonically possessing the festival circuit, including SXSW in Austin, Texas, Toronto's Hot Docs and DOXA in Vancouver. *Satan Wants You* is about the much-sensationalized book *Michelle Remembers* and how the origins of the global “Satanic Panic” of the 1980s can be traced directly back to a young woman and her psychiatrist in Victoria, BC. Learn more at [satanwantsyoufilm.com](http://satanwantsyoufilm.com).

**TREVOR LANTZ**, who holds a Master of Science in Biology, '02, was named a member of the College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists of the Royal Society of Canada. Lantz is an associate professor of Environmental Studies at UVic. Lantz, an ecologist and ethnobiologist, leads a research program rooted in Northern partnerships and examines environmental change in the western Arctic.

UVic Engineering alumnus **ALIREZA MARANDI**, MAsc '08, was awarded a prestigious 2023 Sloan Research Fellowship. Marandi, who grew up in Iran, received a bachelor's degree from



**ALIREZA MARANDI**

the University of Tehran, a Master of Applied Science from UVic and a doctorate from Stanford. He is currently an assistant professor at Caltech.

Political science graduate **DEAN MURDOCK**, BA '03, MA '07, was elected mayor of Saanich last fall. He is a former three-term Saanich councillor and CRD director.



**SONIA NICHOLSON**

Archivist and French Department grad **SONIA NICHOLSON** (formerly Resendes), BA '01, has released her debut novel with Sands Press (Ontario). *Provenance Unknown* is a contemporary romance set in Saanich/Victoria and Paris, France. Touching on themes of identity, family and place, the story follows Michele, an archivist without a past of her own who doesn't expect her profession to get personal.

Nicholson credits her French degree, along with her own adventures in the City of Light and her nearly 15 years of experience in archives, with helping her achieve authenticity. She is currently working on her second novel, which takes place in the Okanagan-Similkameen region where she grew up.

Her work has appeared in various publications. More information at [sonianicholson.com](http://sonianicholson.com)

**NANCY KHALIL**, MSc '05, had a major paper published in a top journal publication series of the American Institute of Mathematical Sciences. Khalil led the paper, "Stability and dynamics of spike-type solutions to delayed Gierer-Meinhardt

equations." Khalil is affiliated with the department of mathematics at Simon Fraser University.

**AAJU PETER**, LLB '05 and Certificate in Indigenous Revitalization '22, is the subject of the feature documentary *Twice Colonized*. The summary reads: "Renowned Inuit lawyer Aaju Peter has led a lifelong fight for the rights of her people. When her son suddenly dies, Aaju embarks on a journey to reclaim her language and culture after a lifetime of whitewashing and forced assimilation. But is it possible to change the world and mend your own wounds at the same time?" The film was produced by Ánorák Film in co-production with Red Marrow Media and EyeSteelFilm and premiered at this year's Sundance Film Festival.

UVic Social Sciences alumna **ALISHA SEVIGNY** won the inaugural Margaret Wise Brown Board Book Award for excellence in literature for young children. Sevigny won in the 0-18 months category for *Give Me a Snickle!*, a bright, playful board book from Victoria-based Orca Book Publishers. Sevigny graduated from UVic in 2003 with a BA in sociology and professional writing and is the author of several books for children.

## 2010s

**KIM MARTIN**, BSc '18, was appointed the first Dean of Indigenous Education in Quebec at John Abbott College.

## 2020s

Recent grad **ASTRA LINCOLN**, who earned a Master of Science in Environmental Studies in 2022, won the 2022 Banff Mountain Book Competition Awards in the Mountain Article category. Her article "The Girl in the Gully" appeared in *Climbing Magazine*.

**KIMIKO FRASER**, BA in honours History, major Visual Arts, '20, recently illustrated *Her Courage Rises, 50 Trailblazing Women of British Columbia and the Yukon*, a collection of inspiring life stories of 50



**KIMIKO FRASER**

extraordinary historical women from BC and the Yukon. The text is written by Haley Healey.

Their collaboration continues with two new picture books as part of a new series, *Trailblazing Canadians*, which is aimed at readers aged 4 to 8. †

### What's New With You?

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

## Farewells

Computer Science professor **MAARTEN VAN EMDEN** died on Jan. 4, 2023, at the age of 85. He was born in Velp, the Netherlands. After attending national flight-training school and working for KLM, he returned to university and obtained a PhD in computer science from the University of Amsterdam. After a postdoctoral fellowship at IBM T.J. Watson Research Center and a research fellowship at Machine Intelligence at the University of Edinburgh, he joined the faculty at the University of Waterloo. In 1987, van Emden joined the



**MAARTEN VAN EMDEN**

University of Victoria Computer Science Department and continued to teach there until 2003. He collaborated with many pioneering computer scientists and contributed his unique viewpoint and insights to the field. Van Emden had a wide range of interests. Beyond mathematics and computer science, he was interested in the history of science, language and writing, and architecture and design for sustainability.

**ARLEY MCNENEY**, activist, writer, Paralympian, devoted mother and community

organizer, passed away in March 2023. McNeney earned a degree in Writing and History from UVic in 2005 and went on to write two acclaimed novels. She played for Canada's national wheelchair basketball team from 2001 to 2007—winning two World Championships and a bronze medal at the 2004 Paralympics.

**LILLY MURRAY** (née **HOFMANN**) died peacefully on March 18, 2023 at age of 95 in Prince George, BC.

After attending normal school in Victoria, she began her teaching career in a small schoolhouse in Yahk, BC where she met her husband Bruce, later moving to Cranbrook, BC to raise their four children. In 1967, Murray and her family moved to Prince George where she began a 25-year career teaching elementary school. She made a lasting impact on her students and was proud of the work she did with them. Murray was a strong advocate for good education and considered it the best insurance policy for a secure future. She returned to school in 1968 working on her Bachelor of Education degree, course by course, often attending summer school until she graduated with her degree from the University of Victoria in 1985.

Her quiet presence filled the room. She was gracious, smart and fiercely independent. She was an avid gardener and loved being in nature. She was a highly skilled seamstress, knitter and quilter, taking great pride in her creations. Murray baked the best cinnamon buns and legendary huckleberry pies, often climbing through the woods to pick her

own huckleberries well into her 80s. She had an adventurous spirit and actively explored the wilderness, both physically and through books. In doing so she became a wealth of knowledge on the history and geography of BC.

She leaves to mourn her four children Robert (Marilyn), Douglas (Ellen), Joan Williams (Paul) and Carol Tyre Desilets (Christian); 10 grandchildren; and 16 great grandchildren.

**GLEN PERKINS**, LLB '87, was born in 1946 and lived in Port Hardy, BC until his family moved to Duncan in 1957. He received a BA from UBC, attended a year of graduate work in economics at U of California at Davis, then returned to BC, where he was a loans officer for the Industrial Development Bank for several years. He moved to Courtenay in 1972, bought 30 acres just outside the city, started renovating an old house, worked as a bookkeeper for an electrical firm for two years, then started a sawmill with his brother in Sayward. He also did welding, repaired machinery and built an apple press, which he and his partner, Ann Bayles, ran on the farm from 1978–1983.

At that point, he realized that more income was needed to bring the farm into some sort of production, so in 1984 they sold the apple press, rented the house and at age 37 he enrolled in UVic law school. Ann followed suit, enrolling in 1985. After being called to the bar, he joined the Quadra Legal Centre where he practiced until returning to Courtenay in 1992. Perkins and Bayles opened a law office in 1993 in Courtenay. When not at the

office, he enjoyed planting hazelnut and walnut orchards, putting in a sophisticated irrigation system and building ingenious machines—including a nut-cracker and an oil press. He could make or fix anything, made lovely furniture and cabinets for the house, built a dry-stone wall, which was subsequently planted with climbing roses, as was the pergola where the couple enjoyed tea with their friends.

They closed the law practice in 2000, and the couple devoted their time to tending the nut trees, propagating other trees and shrubs, growing a huge vegetable garden and numerous shrub borders, going hiking, looking for mushrooms and playing with their dogs. Perkins was a kind and generous man who was honest and straightforward and always provided good service, whether fixing machinery or giving legal advice. For his entire life he was concerned with overpopulation, dwindling natural resources, urban sprawl, climate change, and the diminishing species which used to be so abundant on Vancouver Island. His big heart gave out in November of 2022.

**DR. HARBINDAR SANGHARA**, BEd '84, BA '88, PhD '95, was a valued member of the Department of English for many years. He passed away Nov. 18, 2022. Over the last three decades, Sanghara taught more than a dozen courses, ranging from introductory composition and literature courses to senior-level courses in English Romanticism. Described as a model of personal and professional integrity, he

educated his students with skill, devotion and compassion. Those who shared his classroom soon realized how fortunate they were to have such a tireless champion on their side. His work in English and the Academic and Technical Writing Program enabled him to introduce hundreds of students to the joys of literature and teach them how to write with clarity and assurance—gifts he intended to serve them in university and beyond.

#### AMANDA PAMELA TAYLOR,

Sept. 19, 1988–May 25, 2022

Amanda was a community planner in Whitehorse; she died suddenly in May 2022.

Amanda completed a Bachelor of Arts, Co-Operative Education (geography and environmental studies) at University of Victoria in 2012. She then went on to complete a Master of Planning at Dalhousie University in 2015 and, after graduating, moved to Whitehorse, where she took a job as a planner with the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council.

Amanda found inspiration and motivation in new adventures,



AMANDA PAMELA TAYLOR

and, over the next seven years, she thrived in Whitehorse. She loved the outdoor lifestyle that the Yukon offers and spent her days back-country skiing and mountain biking. Through her cheerful outlook on life, bubbly personality and generosity, Amanda quickly built a large community of friends around her.

*"Amanda was always interested in learning new things, her enthusiasm and curiosity was infectious, and her thoughtful ways made her a treasured colleague and friend to many."*—Hannah McDonald, friend, Whitehorse

Amanda went on to work for the Yukon Environmental and Socio-Economic Assessment Board (YESAB) and the Yukon government, in both the Land

Planning Branch and Community Affairs. In each of these jobs, Amanda made big impacts, and quickly turned colleagues into friends. She was bright, thoughtful, kind and enthusiastic; and she regularly brought in baking to share.

Amanda brought her authentic self to each of the places that she worked. With one of her managers, she jokingly made a list of "things you shouldn't say to your manager." These were often things that needed to be said, and saying them often (but maybe not every single time) helped Amanda build relationships and move projects forward. For Amanda, planning work was not just about ticking boxes. While at YESAB, she worked on several complex and controversial environmental-assessment projects. Her colleagues commented on her ability to bring parties together and keep discussions going.

*"Amanda loved to help. She would take on any task that was asked of her and always provided quality results. She was always positive, always smiling and would*

*encourage others to join her for lunch-time runs. She was a quiet, positive, productive, dependable co-worker—really, the very best kind of colleague to have in your office and on your team."*—Kirsti DeVries, colleague at Yukon Government Community Services Department and friend, Whitehorse.

Amanda brought so much love, light and energy into her community and to the lives of her friends. She was always thinking about how she could do better, both in her professional life and her personal life, and she inspired others to embrace change and strive for the life they want. Amanda is missed across Whitehorse; on the bike trails, in meeting rooms, on mountainsides and in kitchens.

Amanda's life was tragically cut short by a brain hemorrhage, and she died on May 25, 2022. She leaves behind parents Pamela Brewis and Russell Taylor, sister Kimberly Taylor, partner Brad Halt and Moxie and Agon, their huskies.

—Russ Taylor, Amanda's father 

## Truth-seeking podcast brings forward unheard Indigenous stories and histories

*Taapwaywin: Talking about what we know and what we believe* is a new podcast series from the University of Victoria Libraries about memory, power and the journey to find truth.

The eight-episode series launched on major podcast platforms and on the website [Taapwaywin.ca](http://Taapwaywin.ca). Hosted by **RY MORAN**, BA '02, Associate University Librarian–Reconciliation, the provocative series features deep conversations with Survivors, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, academics, artists, activists and community leaders about the importance of truth before reconciliation.

"The podcast is in many ways a deeper response to the questions I've been asked regarding our collective responsibilities towards truth and reconciliation," says Moran.

Moran's goal for the multi-year series is for this podcast to meaningfully contribute to the dialogue underway on some of the complex topics enmeshed within the work of truth and reconciliation. His hope is that this podcast will help Canadians better understand the lived experiences and solutions being put forward by Indigenous Peoples. While the topics covered in the podcasts deal with difficult material, truth-telling takes centre stage in this podcast.

—LISA ABRAM

# Different Fires

How a return to wildfire fighting in BC helped Writing grad **Kelly Bouchard** reboot from the stress and exhaustion of his work with Toronto's homeless.

BY KELLY BOUCHARD, BA '14



**KELLY BOUCHARD**  
fights a wildfire near the  
Montana border.

I'm carrying a 55-pound water pump up a mountain. It's tied to my back with a length of high-pressure hose, the way they taught me 13 years ago at BC Wildfire boot camp. The hose cuts into my chest, making it hard to breathe. My knees hurt. They started hurting when I turned 30 and haven't stopped, which is maybe why most 34-year-olds don't fight wildfires. Now and then, I get a lung full of smoke from the fire churning away in the tree-covered scree to my left. My backpack, which I've spun to my front to make room for the pump, keeps falling forward and tripping me up. Occasionally, I slip and claw at the rock for purchase.

It's uncomfortable, but I couldn't be happier.

I've returned to the BC Wildfire Service after seven years away. Wildfire fighting in the summers paid for my Writing degree at the University of Victoria, but in 2015, three years after graduating, I moved to Toronto for a career change. I earned a community work diploma and took jobs as an outreach worker in the city's homeless encampments and at a drop-in centre for people experiencing homelessness and poverty. In January of 2022, I burned out. Every week, people I cared about died from overdoses or preventable disease. I'd work into the night—maybe cleaning a client's apartment to avoid an eviction, maybe calling the intake line repeatedly to find an available shelter bed—and awake soul-weary and exhausted.

My partner, Selin, and I debated what to do. We agreed I was too passionate about the issue of homelessness to leave the work permanently; I just needed a break. I also needed to work. Toronto rent wasn't cheap. Anyway, the work itself wasn't the problem. It was more the cumulative emotional toll coupled

with a sense I wasn't fixing any real problems. I wasn't increasing the housing stock or lowering Toronto's rent. I'd help one person find housing and another would be evicted. It was like treating burn victims while the fire that burned them raged unchecked. Which was why, I said, a summer with BC Wildfire might be the perfect thing.

Selin wasn't exactly thrilled. She hadn't signed up for a long-distance relationship, or the stress of having a firefighting boyfriend. But I made a compelling case. Firefighting paid well, was far less emotionally taxing than social services, and the effects of actions on the fire line were pleasingly direct. Put more water on the fire, it goes out quicker. Walk faster and the pump gets where it needs to go sooner. Sure, sometimes a fire leapt your line and rampaged across the landscape like a denizen of hell, but even then the prevailing sense was of losing to a superior opponent not that your approach was misguided from the start. You were always, at least, fighting the *actual* fire.

"Besides," I said to clinch the thing. "It's just one season."



A fire on the BC-Yukon border.

Several months later, here I am. At a moss-covered shelf, I lower the pump to the ground and collapse next to it, breathing heavily and admiring the view. The fire staddles the Yukon border in BC's Northwest: 110 hectares of slow-moving ground fire crawling up a valley side. From where I'm sitting, I can see through a veil of smoke to the startlingly-green lake at the valley's bottom which we're pumping into two kilometers of hose strung up the fire's steepest flank. The pump I carried will boost the pressure in that hose to sustain our work around the fire's uppermost edge, but the hose and the rest of my crew have yet to reach me. The nearest members are 100 metres below, using nozzles to extinguish the fire's edge.

I look across the slope, trying to scout a sensible route around the cliffs that abut the fire's top. Friends thought I was crazy going wildfire fighting for a break, but out here my mind is unconflicted, moving from one task to the next. It's the opposite of my experience in social services, where nagging doubts preoccupied me. The long hours of relative mental quiet out in the woods have had interesting results. My third evening on this fire—after a 14-hour workday, a 20-minute helicopter flight back to camp, dinner with the crew in a plywood mess hall, and a cold shower in a modular trailer—I crawled into my tent and cried as I hadn't for years. I thought of deceased clients I never

mourned. I relived frantic overdose responses I'd half forgotten.

After long days of solving concrete problems with physical solutions, I find myself more emotional than I was at the end of my first stint in homeless services. Under the constant weight of fresh tragedies, I adapted by going numb. Free of that weight, I've found catharsis, and if my aching body is paying a toll for my mind's peace, that's fine with me. The work has its own pleasures.

I leave the pump and take a roll of pink survivor's ribbon from my backpack, picking my way across the slope. I hang ribbons from trees every 30 metres creating a path around the fire other crewmembers will follow. First, a cutting pair will clear a trail with chainsaws, then others will lay down hose, connect my pump and start putting wet on hot. It all makes sense, and the satisfaction it brings contrasts sharply with the futility I felt in Toronto.

Not that I'm thinking about any of that as I scramble over boulders and scree. I cross and re-cross the same terrain, pulling and rehangng ribbons to optimize my line, slowly making my way out of the trees onto an exposed rock face. Off to my left, a corridor of mountains curves to the blue horizon. I can't help but smile. The work isn't easy, but I'm grateful to be out here nursing my knees through one more season. Turns out it's just the break I needed. And you can't beat that view. †



# Feel confident with preferred rates on **Home and Car Insurance.**

Graduates could save more  
when you bundle your Car with  
Home, Condo and Tenant's  
Insurance.



**Get a quote and see how much  
you could save!**

**Go to [tdinsurance.com/UVICALUMNI](https://tdinsurance.com/UVICALUMNI)  
Or call 1-844-257-2365**



## OFF CAMPUS



MADELEINE REDFERN

## The View from Iqaluit

UVic Law grad **MADELEINE REDFERN** captured this image of Iqaluit on a February day where temperatures dropped to -42 degrees Celsius with windchill. Redfern, who received a UVic Distinguished Alumni Award in 2022, often documents the bracing temperatures and striking beauty of her home in the territory of Nunavut. Redfern, a former mayor of Iqaluit, graduated in 2005 and works in high tech and innovation.