Angela Sterritt’s memoir exposes truths about missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. See page 7

HOPE & JUSTICE

LINDA L. RICHARDS
The case for wild horses. P 31

FEMINIST VIBRATIONS
Connie Kuhns on k.d. lang, Ferron, Yoko Ono & Vancouver punks. P 20-21

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A 21st century “Raymond Chandler-style” private eye. P 24
The Notorious Georges
Crime and Community in British Columbia’s Northern Interior, 1905-25
Jonathan Swainger

Boozy and boisterous, the Georges – the communities that ultimately became Prince George – have had a seedy reputation since before the First World War, but is Prince George really such a bad lad?

Meeting My Treaty Kin
A Journey toward Reconciliation
Heather Menzies

This intimate story of one settler’s journey toward reconciliation reveals the rich potential that comes from learning to listen and change – decolonization not as to-do list, but as a lived experience.
Lynn Mccarron
British Columbia Lullaby
(Sandhill Book
Marketing $14.95)
Geoff Myatt
The Eventful Life of Philip
Hankins: Worldwide
Traveler and British
Columbia’s Early History
(Cativo $26)
Lucia Frangione
Grazie
(Talonbooks $21.95)

LEONA PRINCE
Leone & Gabrielle Prince
Be a Good Ancestor
(Ova $21.95)

Lyn Baldwin
Drawing Botany Home:
A Rooted Life
(Rousky Mountain Books $30)

Katherine Martinko
Field Notes from a Sister
Practical Advice to Get Kids
Off Screens and Find Balance
(New Society $24.99)

Michael
Nicoll Yahgudnas
A Haida Manga
(Douglas & McInnes $34.95)

Philippa Joly
A Kid’s Guide to Plants of the
Pacific Northwest
with Cool Facts,
Activities and Recipes
(Harbour $24.95)

Hilary Peach
Childhood Unplugged:
Practical Advice to Get Kids
Off Screens and Find Balance
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Trevor Mares Hughes
Capturing The Sunrises:
Hamilton Mack Laing and
The First Argonauts of the
Expedition of 1925
(Rorosdale Press $24.95)

Sam George, Jill Young Goldthorpe,
Liz Badam, Egan MacPherran,
Jaline Whitton
The Fire Still Burns:
Life In and After
Residential School
(UBC Press $19.95)

Rika Ruebsaat
My Paddle’s Keen and Bright
(New Star $24)

Pilot, spies & World War II

A
uthor, actor and accom-
plished swordsman C.C.
Humphreys has released
his 22nd novel Someday
I’ll Find You (DoubleDay
$25.00), which quickly found its way on to
the Globe & Mail’s list of top Cana-
dian fiction books for three weeks. Set
against the backdrop of World War II,
this story is full of intrigue, espionage,
longing and an appreciation for classi-
cal music. Humphreys has combined
thorough research with complex char-
acters that will interest historians
and romantics alike. He also wrote in his
family history (Humphreys’ father, a
British fighter pilot during the war, met
Humphreys’ mother, a Norwegian spy-
in-training, in London). This is the novel,
says Humphreys, that he “had to write,”
but delving into his family’s past was not
always easy. Both the bad and the good
that comes with being involved in a war
had to be addressed. Humphreys creates
a story that will transport readers to the
challenges, pains and hope of the 1940s.
Prior to turning his hand to historical
novels and fantasy fiction, Humphreys
worked as an actor for 25 years playing
roles as diverse as Hamlet, Clive Parnell
worked as an actor for 25 years playing
roles as diverse as Hamlet, Clive Parnell
Prior to turning his hand to historical
novels and fantasy fiction, Humphreys
worked as an actor for 25 years playing
roles as diverse as Hamlet, Clive Parnell

TOXIC DRUG CRISIS

More than 2,300 illicit drug users died in BC in
2022, higher than in any previous year. In Vancouver alone, one or
more people per day dies from toxic drugs. This carnage is likely
to continue as former Vancouver mayor Kennedy Stewart outlines
in Decrim: How We Decriminalized Drugs in British Columbia
(Harbour $24.95). While the book’s focus is on the toxic drug cri-
sis, Kennedy also writes of his political career trajectory and why
progressive changes to past approaches for drug treatment have
been so hard to achieve. Treating the calamity as a criminal
justice issue rather than a public health problem has been the
norm, and it’s not working. But politicians dragged their feet on the first small
step of decriminalization (decrim for short) because it is misunderstood and
overly politicized. Voting for policies like decrim generally leads to politicians
losing elections. This book explains how little our current system offers drug
addicts and how far we still have to go to prevent toxic drug deaths, even
when there is the political will to do so.

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  Francisce McCabe
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  DL Acken & Aurelia Louvet
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  $40 hc | $17.99 ebook

- **Heaven on the Half Shell**
  The Story of the Oyster in the Pacific Northwest
  David George Gordon
  A history of how oysters shaped the environment, culture, and economies of the Northwest.
  $35 pb

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Cowboy boots, mud & a millennial in Wells

Josie Teed left city life and spent a year in the town of Wells (population 250) while working as a curatorial assistant and costumed interpreter at Barkerville Historic Town, which she chronicles in her memoir, *British Columbiana: A Millennial in a Gold Rush Town* (Dundurn $22.99). Having recently completed a master’s thesis in medieval archeology, Teed’s ruminations on the “Disneyfication” of history and the characters she rubs up against in “The West” are insightful. “I thought that, although it was a common genre of film, no one really paid much attention to the fact that the west was not some big homogenous thing,” she writes. “I suppose the stories were all the same: some representation of the idea of manifest destiny, and later in post-Westerns, subversions of it. Is that the only thing these places had in common? That and cowboy boots and mud and cows and horses and some misguided notion that they deserved to survive out there because they were stronger than other people?”

A hotel could be built for $10,000 in BC in 1896, which the gold prospector turned hotelier Jim Wallace learned when he set up the first such establishment in Princeton, as portrayed in *Room at the Inn: Historic Hotels of British Columbia’s Southern Interior* (Heritage $26.95) by Glen A. Mofford. Like many of the wooden structures of the period, the Princeton Hotel burned down in 1911; it was rebuilt in brick in 1912 and remained a landmark until it too was lost to fire in 2006. Mofford, a historian with a passion for BC’s social history, died in 2022 days, after completing the manuscript for *Room at the Inn*, in which he describes 40 historic hotels in the southern interior of the province. The remarkable characters who built and ran these establishments are as much a part of this posthumously published book as the hotel buildings, many of which served as community centres for the boom-bust towns that sprang up when gold diggers, miners, settlers and eventually tourists shaped BC’s culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Mofford’s diligent research turned up plenty of colourful anecdotes about a bygone era.

**Race with the “crazies”**

In 2017, Vancouver cyclist Meaghan Marie Hackinen entered the Trans Am Bike Race in the US. It’s a race “only for crazies,” says British-German Juliana Buhring, another ultrar endurance cyclist and writer, that requires entrants to cover 4,264 miles (6,862 kilometres), ten states, several mountain ranges and over 150,000 feet of vertical gain. The goal is simple, writes Hackinen in her travelogue *Shifting Gears: Coast to Coast on the Trans Am Bike Race* (NeWest $23.95): “get on your bicycle and ride across the country, as fast as you possibly can.” With only self-support (no teams), the route is grueling. Hackinen describes her body giving out in a few instances, like day four when she tried to cup water with her hands. “My fingers simply refused to come together,” she writes. “I pawed my cheeks, trying to coax feeling into fingertips.” But she recovers and carries on, enjoying the landscape as if it were “the glossy pages of a coffee-table book” and feeling like she and the other cyclists “were cowboys on metal horses—blasting off in search of untold adventure.” Most ride through the night, catch a little sleep and get up at 4 am to start again. Hackinen finishes in 25 days.

**Rooms with a view on history**

Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier speaking from the balcony of the Queen’s Hotel in Golden in 1910.

**HAPPILY “FUR-EVER” AFTER**

Saying goodbye to a feline friend is never easy. In the illustrated children’s book *Paradise for Cats* (Harbour $19.95), Adrian Raeside has created a utopia where cats, dogs, birds and mice all get along in the afterlife. This new cat-centric tale “purrfectly” complements Raeside’s 2012 bestseller *The Rainbow Bridge: A Visit to Pet Paradise* (Harbour), only this time we follow the story of young Amy and her cat, Rocky. When Rocky passes away, Amy gets to visit her at the Rainbow Bridge, a paradise where she learns that there’s a happily “fur-ever” after for pets and their human companions. Raeside’s aim is to bring hope and humour to an otherwise sorrowful topic.

**Art by Adrian Raeside, Paradise for Cats**
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Douglas & McIntyre

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New Answers to the Great Arctic Mystery
Ken McGoogan

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Economics, Politics, and the Transformation of the Business of Hockey in Canada
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like the land Unbroken was written on, opening up “like a palm from a flat,” Angela Sterritt (Gitxsan) releases the truths of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls in her new book. Sterritt doesn’t just write about our sisters; she walks with them. After pre-ordered Unbroken the same day it was announced—when an Indigenous woman uses the power of her voice, I stop and listen.

Beginning with a trigger warning (of the violence and trauma about to be described) wrapped in “an offering of love, kindness, and care to blanket and comfort you,” Sterritt’s voice rings with compassion as she invites us to take this journey with her. Sterritt is an award-winning investigative journalist for CBC Vancouver whose work is hallmarked by a commitment to amplifying Indigenous voices. As a child, Sterritt saw her respected Indigenous Elders and this injustice, she says “planted the seed for me to start telling our own stories with the bedrock of accuracy and empathy.”

And Sterritt does this, carefully laying out how the history of colonial violence and genocide led to the ongoing horror of missing and murdered sisters. Her book contains many difficult but essential conversations that demonstrate how violence and missing Indigenous women and girls is marked by a commitment to amplifying the seed for me to start telling our own stories with the bedrock of accuracy and empathy.

Through her own vulnerable stories, alongside historical and legal context, Sterritt invites readers to confront uncomfortable truths and participate in the ongoing journey towards justice and reconciliation. “Our stories map a supernatural trajectory—one that fuses our spirituality, our creation stories and our land, all of which the colonists attempted to chop up or erase,” she writes. Sterritt’s journey moves from the history of her Gitxsan Nation, when it resisted mining encroachment in the early 1900s, to her own history living on the streets of Vancouver starting at the age of fourteen. She navigates this timeline with a flow that belies the amount of courage and heart it would take to write. “In my darkest days, I recall these histories—a constant reminder that I too can heal my broken parts,” she says.

The book begins with the names of women who have been preyed on. “Trying to find answers—about what happened to the women, who killed them, and why so little has been done about it—comes from a place of discomfort for me because in many ways, it’s personal,” says Sterritt. She herself could have been one of the MMIWG as evident in the unflinching descriptions of her years as a homeless teen, sleeping under bridges and navigating foster homes and hotels while in survival mode. Characters in the book range from family members such as her great-grandmother Lou Vuxx (translated: “inside the copper”) to advocates, sisters in spirit, friends and mentors. Sterritt’s intuition is a force throughout, as she shares the places where trickster stories became for her “a metaphor for survival,” she says, adding “they reminded me that even in chaos, with ingenuity and acceptance of the ever-changing world around us, anything is attainable.”

Unbroken also spotlights the ingrained systemic racism of an oppressive justice system. From the biased attitudes of law enforcement towards Indigenous women, to the convicted malice of Judge David William Ramsay (notorious for being sent to prison for sexual assaults on Indigenous minors, one as young as 12, and some of whom had appeared before him in court in Prince George), Sterritt speaks truth to power.

Ultimately, Unbroken is about the intricate ways colonialism continues to impact our lives—showing there is much work to do. For example, there is still a grave discrepancy between how white women and girls’ disappearances and murders are handled by police. This disparity follows through in how the media responds and covers these stories, although Sterritt notes where there have been improvements. Yet, for many years Indigenous families and advocates in BC have had to agitate for more coverage of the overrepresentation of murdered and missing Indigenous women. Sterritt continues to honour and raise those voices.

When she’s invited to sing on the front line of Vancouver’s Women’s Memorial March with Matriarchs Bernie Williams (Haida) and Gladys Radek (Gitxsan, Wet’suwet’en), the reader soars with her as she marches in power, feeling her “heart grow to the size of the city,” a city filled with darker memories. In sharing her path, Sterritt invites us to a world where the brilliance of Indigenous women is celebrated, and “together, they can build lives of joy and abundance.” Unbroken is a testament to the strength and resilience of Indigenous women and serves as a resource for understanding as well as a call for change.

Cover Review

Unbroken: My Fight for Survival, Hope, and Justice for Indigenous Women and Girls

by Angela Sterritt

(Greystone Books $34.95)

Reviewer Odette Auger on Unbroken, linking BC’s colonial history to the ongoing tragedy of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

BY ODETTE AUGER

"Even in chaos, with ingenuity and acceptance of the ever-changing world around us, anything is attainable." —ANGELA STERRITT

M any times over the span of her journalism career, Angela Sterritt has had to fight to get air time for stories about Indigenous peoples. The usual excuse given was that she was “advocating” for the people in her reports and that she had not fulfilled the responsibility of a reporter.

"Those using the term ‘advocacy journalism’ were implying we Indigenous reporters were ‘too close to the story’ (even if the community was hundreds of kilometres away from ours and a completely different culture) and hence biased, unable to cover a story with balance and integrity,” says Sterritt, later adding, “I realized quickly that I was being told to blend in, assimilate, and accept the norms there, or leave. But I chose not to. I chose to keep pushing to tell Indigenous stories. I chose my dignity. I chose my Indigeneity. I chose my humanity."
Marc Edge unearths the gory details of Canada’s loss of media to a US hedge fund and Trump-enabler David Pecker.

A hallmark of media concentration is massive closures of newspapers, particularly in smaller cities, that result from takeovers. In 2017, swap-and-close deal, Postmedia and Torstar Corporation, owner of the Toronto Star and other papers, together traded 41 newspapers and closed 36. Torstar got 19 papers and closed down 15; Postmedia got 22 and closed all but one. Later, Torstar was taken over by a private investment firm, last June in merger talks with Postmedia. Closer to home in BC, deals between Black Press and Glacier Media brought about newspaper shutdowns on Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland. Combined, these media moves resulted in large layoffs of journalists and editors, and a loss of local and regional coverage. Edge argues that the newspaper business was more profitable than popularly believed—as a result of drastic cost cutting, layoffs and federal government bailouts, as well as the switch to paywalls—but profits are rarely invested in improved coverage.

And what was the oversight of Canada’s Competition Act and Competition Bureau when all this was happening? Edge argues that small bailouts against Postmedia’s U.S. hedge fund acquisition could have aligned with Canada’s traditional policy—there were no charges laid in the loss of newspaper companies.

Edge also criticizes the federal government’s bailouts, lobbied for and received by Postmedia and its peers, which in effect kept payments flowing to US hedge funds. He takes a dim view of the Online News Act (Bill C-18), passed last June after his book was published, which is designed to compensate Canadian media outlets for their news content that is linked on Google, Facebook and other social media. Both Google and Meta-owned Facebook then declared they would block Canadian news content on their platforms. The Act is intended to have these American giants either pay to post Canadian news or enter a CRTC-led binding arbitration, a similar process that led to a settlement in Australia, though Meta has said it will not negotiate. On this topic, Edge could be more mindful of Canadian sovereignty interests.

In 2022, Edge concludes, the Postmedia balance sheet threatened its interest payments to American owners. Ultimately, he predicts, Postmedia will sink, and it’s probably best to let Postmedia fail rather than keeping it alive through government bailouts, as it would keep paying off the debt held by its New York hedge fund owners. "It will sink, and it’s probably best to let Postmedia fail rather than keeping it alive through government bailouts, as it would keep paying off the debt held by its New York hedge fund owners."
Since 1995, BC BookWorld and the Vancouver Public Library have co-sponsored the Woodcock Award and the Writers Walk at 350 W. Georgia St. in Vancouver. This $5,000 award is also sponsored by Dr. Yosef Wosk, The Writers’ Trust of Canada, and Pacific BookWorld News Society.

SUSAN MUSGRAVE

Susan Musgrave (born March 12, 1951) is a prodigious writer with 20 published collections of poetry, four novels, four books of non-fiction, eight children’s books and a chapbook. She has also edited more than a dozen books. Musgrave has been recognized with awards and nominations across all her genres. Included in the long list of awards are two BC Book Prizes; a Matt Cohen Award: In Celebration of a Writing Life; and a Spirit Bear Award (for a vital and enduring contribution to the poetry of the Pacific North-west). Musgrave has also been shortlisted three times for the Governor General’s Award, twice for the Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour and once for the Griffin Poetry Prize for her most recent collection *Exculpatory Lilies*, in 2023.
The shattering

From an Indigenous family to the horrors of St. Paul’s Indian Residential School, Sam George reveals his journey from drugs and crime to the healing power of his culture.

The Fire Still Burns: Life In and After Residential School by Sam George with Jill Yonit Goldberg and Liam Bolen, Dylan MacPhee, and Tanis Wilson (Porich Books / UBC Press $19.95)

BY GRAHAM CHANDLER

On late summer day when he was about seven, Sam George was at home playing with his brother Andy on the living room floor when they heard a knock on the door.

“It was a strange thing because nobody on the reserve ever knocked,” he recalls. “Little did I know that it was only the beginning of the trauma that would suffocate my innocence and change my life forever.”

That “beginning” George writes of was an abrupt and shocking change from a carefree and happy childhood in a closely knit Indigenous family to a hellish eight years in St. Paul’s Indian Residential School, leading to three decades of drinking, drugs and crime, four and a half years in prison and four failed marriages.

Squamish Elder Sam George fills the first two chapters of this engrossing book describing his idyllic early years: collecting and learning wild medicines with his grandmother; fishing for clam and crab, cooking them in sand pits and eating them off cedar bark plates; smoking salmon; hunting deer; and days of drumming in the Longhouse.

Then, a shattering. George pulls no punches in telling it like it was at that school. St Paul’s was in the 500 block of West Keith Road of North Vancouver on what is now the parking lot for St.

Sam George, a retired longshoreman and semi-retired drug and alcohol counsellor, works as an educator with the Indian Residential School Survivors Society.

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New Voices from BC

Read with us. These are your stories.
Thomas Aquinas Regional Secondary School. Run by the Order of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate from 1899 to 1958, St. Paul’s was demolished in 1959.

George writes candidly and poignantly. Upon arrival his hair was shorn, and he was stripped and doused in pesticide, given school garb and assigned a number. “I was number 3,” he says. “A lot of the time, the nuns wouldn’t even use your name.”

Then there was the strap that all the nuns carried—and used—routinely. And the molesting. George writes of the regular sexual assaults over a two-year period that he endured at the hands of one of the nuns. “One thing that struck me about the whole ordeal was that everything she was doing to me she and all the other nuns said you would go to Hell for. I felt ugly, dirty, and used.”

For a long time he told no one. “Instead of being hurt, I would choose to be mad. I held it all in. I became violent. I started fighting a lot.”

“Hate is all I ever felt for the nuns,” he writes. “I felt hate for the nuns because they felt hate for us. We were children witnessing trauma twenty or thirty times a day. We saw kids as young as three or four getting beat up. They would get beat up for speaking their language. Not to mention that we were constantly called ugly, stupid, savages, and dumb Indians—things like that.”

He was nine the first time he ran away. Home was just two blocks away. “Before I knew it, the RCMP were knocking on my door.” Handcuffed, he was driven back to the school in the squad car.

Around thirteen George started drinking on the weekends that they were allowed to go home, and in the summers. “We’d drink to get drunk, to feel good,” he says. From there it was a downhill slide: more drinking, drugs, a conviction for the attempted manslaughter of his brother, the Oakalla prison years and more—all vividly described, with some interesting bits like the time he smoked a joint with Jimi Hendrix.

But, what did he learn at the school? To that, he writes, “I learned how to steal, I learned how to lie, I learned how to mistrust, and I learned how to hate. I hated the nuns, I hated the priests, I hated the policemen, I hated the judges, I hated government officials, and I hated the teachers. And for all of it I owe thanks to my time at St. Paul’s Indian Residential School.”

He wraps with one positive from it all: “I learned how to survive.” George is now an educator with the Indian Residential School Survivors Society. The book includes a useful and practical reader’s guide to assist students and instructors in considering the various aspects of George’s story. It’s a harrowing tale that adds to the growing record of the horrific legacy of residential schools in Canada. George’s personal story culminates with the lessons he learned for rebuilding his life after the mountain of trauma he suffered: by embracing his traditional culture—the very ways the nuns had tried to beat out of him.

Graham Chandler is a Vancouver-based freelance writer with over 700 published works, many with anthropological and heritage themes. He holds a PhD in archaeology from the University of London, UK.
Baldwin tells of her journey from a troubled upbringing to life as a biologist, and how she uses art to overcome people’s tendency of “plant blindness.”
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“Thrilling, joyous...pages pack a huge punch.”
—School Library Journal, starred review

Don’t Miss Mike and Nancy Deas at the Vancouver Writers Fest, October 19, 2023
While the power of wildfires can surge beyond human control, we are in charge of whether we provoke it.

I am reading John Vaillant’s *Fire Weather: The Making of a Beast* in the parking lot of a medical facility in suburban Parksville, on Vancouver Island. Inside, my partner is getting a bone-density scan. It’s a routine procedure for women of a certain age, she assures me, and nothing to worry about. Yet I’m alarmed, and something to worry about is waiting just over the horizon.

Literally just over the horizon: looming above the low hills to the west is a pillar of grey smoke and ash, evidence of the Cameron Bluffs wildfire that has destroyed 229 hectares of forest and temporarily closed highway access to Port Alberni and the long beaches beyond.

“This is June on the West Coast. We live in a rainforest. This should not be happening. And yet overhead the sky is blue, the sun is hot, and the Cameron Bluffs fire is just one of dozens that have flared up across British Columbia, burning at a time of year that has historically been marked by moderate temperatures and copious rainfall. Something unprecedented is happening, and Vaillant is here to tell you why.

Fire Weather is nominally about one specific fire: the May 2016 conflagration that turned Alberta’s fossil-fuel epicentre, Fort McMurray, into hell on earth; that destroyed thousands of homes; and that burned unchecked by human efforts for almost three months before rain and cooler temperatures brought it to a full stop. It’s the second-largest fire in Alberta’s history, and among the costliest ever in Canadian history.

But fire is not only about destruction. Fire is the stuff of legend, of apocalyptic fantasy, of fear and fascination, of awe and respect. It is its author’s ability to invest wildfire with mythic power that Vaillant explores, and the result is an elegantly argued book that could well be a spark for change.

The first-hand accounts collected in *Fire Weather* are terrifying, as are the security-camera videos captured and saved on cellphone by fleeing residents. “One in particular looks like it could have been shot by the director of *The Blair Witch Project,*” Vaillant reports. “The fire is right there, right outside, hobbling this way and that, like it’s trying to see inside the room…. Suddenly, the fire punches through the second layer of glass, making the same sound and hole as a fist. There has been no three-dimensional intervention of any kind, only this vaporous, spectral presence, and yet it is battering its way into the room. This is what horror is—a malignant entity from another dimension, breaking through to this one.”

The science behind the calamity is also the stuff of nightmares. Given the right conditions, wildfires can jump rivers, melt heavy machinery and turn tall conifers into flaming torches in a nanosecond. The forest conditions were right that Alberta spring: unusually dry air and high winds contributed to the disaster. “With the forest already primed to burn,” Vaillant explains, “a pyrocB [pyrocumulonimbus cloud], combined with wind-driven embers and lightning, changed this fire from a localized conflagration into a perpetual motion machine of destruction.” And once this machine left the forest, conditions created by humans were even more propitious. The modern house—with its vinyl siding, vinyl flooring and kiln-dried framing timbers—is a collection of incendiary devices waiting to ignite; building thousands of these houses on postage-stamp-sized lots and then stuffing them with propane tanks and internal-combustion vehicles is... almost suicidal.

Even more terrifying, however, is Vaillant’s clear-eyed explanation of how the boreal forest—and the California redwoods, the Australian eucalyptus stands, even the Arctic tundra—came to burn. We did it, and there’s every reason to believe that we’ll keep doing it.

“Fire has no heart, no soul and no concern for the damage it does, or who it harms,” he writes. “Its focus is solely on sustaining itself and spreading as broadly as possible, wherever possible. In this way, fire resembles the unspoken priorities of most commercial industries, corporate boards and shareholders, and, more broadly, the colonial impulse. It has taken decades, but the dissembling, distracting, gaslighting, bullying and outright lying perpetrated by the fossil fuel industry... is being exposed in ever harsher light.”

There are parallels here, in both structure and intent, with Vaillant’s earlier and highly recommended *The Tiger: A True Story of Vengeance and Survival* (Vintage, 2011). Both concern man’s inhumanity towards nature, the inevitable karmic consequences of human greed, and the scarily beautiful allure of a fearsome apex predator—and one of the great strengths of *Fire Weather* is its author’s ability to invest wildfire with life, character, even agency. He doesn’t anthropomorphize fire, but in an almost animist way treats it as an unknowable, unrulable elemental. The underlying message, of course, is that while fire’s power can surge beyond our control, we are in charge of whether we provoke it.

At the moment—as fire season 2023 has already proven—we persist on— we persist on adding fuel to the blaze. Even more than rising sea levels, multi-year droughts, flash floods and freakish storms, fire is already the visible face of the climate emergency in the industrialized world. Can we alter our ways? It’s doubtful, but this brave, angry, compassionate and elegantly argued book could well be a spark for change.

*Alexander Varty is a veteran West Coast arts journalist living on unceded Snuneymuxw territory.*

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*Fire Weather: The Making of a Beast* by John Vaillant (Knopf $38)

*By Alexander Varty*
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In his first collection of non-fiction, Vancouver-born poet and rabbi, Yosef Wosk shares his trip adventures, many of which are as much about internal journeys as geographical wanderings. The following is an abridged version of a longer memoir of time spent in Egypt that gives the book its title.

BY YOSEF WOSK

Lured by the notion of wisdom, Yosef Wosk travels the world.

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BY YOSEF WOSK

The vertical height of the Great Pyramid is 449 feet, roughly equivalent to a 45-storey building if measured vertically, but the extended slant height of each face is 610 feet. Perched on the outer shell of the greatest building of antiquity, under the hypnotic gaze of a full moon, I found myself ascending from the desert floor at a precipitous 51.5° angle of incline.

It was much more harrowing than anticipated. Half-way up I became petrified, feeling I could neither continue the climb nor descend to terra firma below. I desperately projected that the only way I could be rescued from the man-made mountain was if a helicopter lowered a rope and lifted me to safety.

Seduced by the siren song of gravity’s ghost and with desert winds urging me to let go, I contemplated suicide, not out of depression but with a dramatic leap into what I imagined to be a transcendent realm of eternal peace.

Saved by a sudden vision of the future, I barely managed to restrain myself from stepping into the abyss of certain doom. Still trembling, I closed my eyes, caught my breath, turned to the Great Mother and embraced her massive bones.

I share these sensations with you reluctantly even now, wary of reigniting the trauma. I felt I was willing to sacrifice everything—to die to my limited self, to become a martyr to soul-searching.

I was young and foolish enough—about 35 years old—that I still wanted to accomplish the audacious feat of reaching the summit. With my guide Ibrahim’s assistance, I continued for another frightening hour or two of slow climbing. When I finally arrived at the top of the pyramid, I discovered that it had lost its cap and a few layers of stone. The structure is about thirty feet shorter than when it was originally built, 4,500 years ago.
The deeper we descended, the thinner the oxygen became, and the more one felt prone to hallucinations.
2023 GEORGE RYGA AWARD FOR SOCIAL AWARENESS IN LITERATURE

Out of Hiding

Holocaust Literature of British Columbia (Ronsdale Press) by Alan Twigg

In his comprehensive collection of memories and historical context, covering 85 authors and 160 books from British Columbia, Alan Twigg conveys with raw power the stories of survivors and first-hand witnesses of the Holocaust. In its commitment to antisemitism, this book presents many perspectives that serve to show the wide scope of the Holocaust and its impact across many parts of the world. Twigg has since built a website about one of the Holocaust survivors, Vancouverite Rudolf Vrba: www.rudolfvrba.com

FINALISTS

Beyond Rights: The Nisga’a Final Agreement and the Challenges of Modern Treaty Relationships (UBC Press) by Carole Blackburn

Cambium Blue: A Novel (Harbour Publishing) by Maureen Brownlee

The Punishment: Poems (Nightwood Editions) by Joseph Dandurand

This is Assisted Dying: A Doctor’s Story of Empowering Patients at the End of Life (Simon & Schuster) by Stefanie Green

Judges for the George Ryga Award were author and poet Trevor Carolan, retired librarian Jane Curry and BC BookWorld publisher Beverly Cramp.

With the sponsorship of Yosef Wosk, VPL and Pacific BookWorld News Society, the annual George Ryga Award is given to a BC writer who has achieved an outstanding degree of social awareness in a new book published in the preceding calendar year.
Femi

A rich time capsule of women’s music-making that includes k.d. lang, Ferron, Yoko Ono, Vancouver’s punk and alternative underground scene, and beyond.

BY ALEXANDER VARTY

As a veteran West Coast arts journalist living on unceded Sto:lo territory, I was intrigued by the prospect of delving into the rich tapestry of women’s music-making in Vancouver in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The book, Rubymusic: A Popular History of Women’s Music and Culture by Connie Kuhns (Caitlin Press $26), promised to provide a comprehensive overview of the scene, and I was curious to see how well it would deliver on that promise.

K

After perusing the book at random, I found that it generally provided a thorough and engaging account of the women’s music scene in Vancouver. The book covers a wide range of artists and groups, from the short-lived quartet that became near-legends to the all-women or woman-centric bands that have since become near-legends. Kuhns provides an alternative to the louche tales of many other books on the subject, and the book’s coverage of the alternative underground scene is particularly strong.

One of the book’s strengths is its focus on the music itself, and Kuhns does an excellent job of getting the crossover star to open up about her faith—though at times it feels like the reader is left feeling that maybe he was wrong to so thoroughly ignore Grant during her 1980s heyday. While the book generally ignores Grant during her 1980s heyday, it’s a useful guide to a vibrant musical community that was so far underground that even the Vancouver underground mostly ignored it. It’s a fine homage to women, like cover star Ellen McIlwaine, who lived full lives on their own terms. And it’s a worthwhile read, although perhaps too random to peruse from cover to cover.

Whether that’s an opportunity lost is up for debate. The book that Rubymusic isn’t would be a much more labour-intensive project than this subjective and somewhat haphazard dip into Kuhns’ archives, and probably the only way to get it funded would be to do it as a doctoral thesis. Another approach, at least in terms of addressing the under-recorded Vancouver women’s music scene, might be to start with the music itself and work out from there. A Native North America-like collection of rare and unreleased recordings accompanied by an expanded version of Kuhns’ Guisit essay “Strange Women,” included here, would be a historian’s delight, as well as an illuminating companion to this volume. (A website might be the way to go, though, with such a project.)

Let’s conclude with what Rubymusic is, though, rather than what it isn’t. It’s a good survey of North American feminist music-making in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, evenly divided between acknowledged stars and tireless activists. It’s a useful guide to a vibrant musical community that was so far underground that even the Vancouver underground mostly ignored it. It’s a fine homage to women, like cover star Ellen McIlwaine, who lived full lives on their own terms. And it’s a worthwhile read, although perhaps too random to peruse from cover to cover.

Alexander Varty is a veteran West Coast arts journalist living on unceded Sto:lo territory.

k.d. lang

Rubymusic: A Popular History of Women’s Music and Culture by Connie Kuhns

BY ALEXANDER VARTY

randomly flipping through Rubymusic, journalist and broadcaster Connie Kuhns’ “popular history of women’s music and culture,” can be a disconcerting experience. So let’s try it, why don’t we?

Here on page 108, we have “Quietly Christian Pop. Amy Grant’s Spiritual Songs Reach Out to a Secular Audience,” a 1988 Q&A from the Georgia Straight weekly in which Kuhns does a great job of getting the crossover star to open up about her faith, the African American influences on her music, and the cognitive dissonance of being both a Christian and a “big, bull-headed” American. Kuhns asks smart questions, and Grant gives smart answers, and this reader is left feeling that maybe he was wrong to so thoroughly ignore Grant during her 1980s heyday. Inspiring curiosity: it’s one of the hallmarks of good non-fiction.

Dropping in again at page 36, there’s “There is a Wind That Never Dies: The Life of Yoko Ono,” which by rights should be something completely different, but isn’t. Published in Grant in 2019, this longer-form essay dispels some of the racist and sexist myths about a pioneering multimedia artist whose music and culture.”

Ono’s work, it’s a seemingly simple concept that can produce a complex transformation in those who take the time to consider it.

Scoping out page 183, there’s “True to Herself,” an interview with folk-music influencer and former Slocan Valley resident Ronnie Gilbert, culled from the pages of the feminist arts journal Kinesis in 1985. A founding member, along with Pete Seeger, of the 1950s folk group the Weavers, Gilbert was just then enjoying a revival of interest in her work sparked by her collaboration with women’s music pioneer Holly Near. Again, Kuhns shows herself to be a sensitive and well-prepared interviewer who brings out the best in an articulate and impassioned subject.

Elsewhere in Rubymusic we have an “as told to” oral history of women in Vancouver’s punk and alternative-music scene, including a “family tree” of all-women or woman-centric bands active between 1977 and 1988. (One error: it’s Tin Twist, not Twin Twist, but I only caught that because I own a copy of the short-lived quartet’s sole release, a three-song EP on the co-operative MoDaMu label.) There are profiles of artists who have since become near-legends (Ferron, k.d. lang) and others who have lapsed into obscurity, whether self-willed or repressed by the industry. Whether that’s an opportunity lost is up for debate.

But what Rubymusic doesn’t provide is what its cover promises: the aforementioned “popular history of women’s music and culture.” Whether that’s an opportunity lost is up for debate. The book that Rubymusic isn’t would be a much more labour-intensive project than this subjective and somewhat haphazard dip into Kuhns’ archives, and probably the only way to get it funded would be to do it as a doctoral thesis. Another approach, at least in terms of addressing the under-recorded Vancouver women’s music scene, might be to start with the music itself and work out from there. A Native North America-like collection of rare and unreleased recordings accompanied by an expanded version of Kuhns’ Guisit essay “Strange Women,” included here, would be a historian’s delight, as well as an illuminating companion to this volume. (A website might be the way to go, though, with such a project.)

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Alexander Varty is a veteran West Coast arts journalist living on unceded Sto:lo territory.
The Moral Lepers


Dropping in again at page 36, a mildly incongruous interview, which might have been better placed later in the book. Kuhns asks smart questions, and American Kuhns shows herself to be a sensitive and well-considered interviewer. She's asking about her faith, the African American influences on her music, and her experience as a woman activist. It's a fine homage to women, like cover star Ono, which by rights should have been made in a book about her. Never Dies: The Life of Yoko Ono, which by rights should have been made in a book about her. Never Dies: The Life of Yoko Ono.
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Debbie Bateman: “Women over fifty are a significant force in the world, and we know middle-age can be as life-shifting as adolescence.”

Debbie Bateman can make you laugh out loud, grit your teeth in anger, and struggle not to shed tears—all in the same story.

We simply do not often read stories in contemporary literature with as much gritty depth and maturity as these by Debbie Bateman. When tackling marital ultimatums, say, or the profound impact of parental cowardice, this writer delivers with visceral honesty and a seemingly innate sense of pacing and diction. We readers are in the hands of a highly skilled writer, one who has served a long apprenticeship to debut with a collection as accomplished as this one. Brava!

“[Debbie Bateman] takes an unflinching look at what our bodies get up to when our minds are riddled with conflicts, major and minor.”  
— CAROLINE WOODWARD

We do not often read stories of our bodies being violated, furious teenagers. Now she is a woman wracked with cramps, bleeding non-stop for weeks, alternating between sudden chills and hot flashes, her body image at an all-time low. Bateman’s narrative voice is wonderfully energetic, replete with vivid and pungent images. Some sentences snap with tension, others roll out luxuriously. tee phenomenally splendid collection of short stories by SFU Writer’s Studio grad Debbie Bateman is described by three-time Governor General’s Award nominee author Sharon Butala as a “wonderful, fierce, and above all intelligent collection that grows in power with each succeeding story.” To which I will add, it is a rare and gratifying event to read fiction that does not hold back about the truths of being in a woman’s body, especially an aging woman’s fed-up and out-of-shape temple of the soul.

We meet Pauline in the first story and understand she is now fleeing her marital home, the first occasion being many decades earlier when she was a violated, furious teenager. Now she is a seething, and still furious, menopausal woman wracked with cramps, bleeding non-stop for weeks, alternating between sudden chills and hot flashes, her body image at an all-time low. Bateman deploys a grizzly hilarious sense of humour and the reader is primed for mishaps involving mind and body when an astute friend recommends a yoga challenge class. “Listen to your body,” says their instructor… her voice is soothing. She steps precisely onto the centre of her mat, and Pauline’s throat coats with an afterwash of anxiety.

For years Pauline has put up with her hypercritical husband, Oliver, a successful accountant with high blood pressure, so we immediately understand how the very sight of such a man deploys a grimly hilarious sense of humour and the reader is primed for mishaps involving mind and body when an astute friend recommends a yoga challenge class. “Listen to your body.”

Pauline, whom we met in the first story, takes an unflinching look at what our bodies get up to when our minds are riddled with conflicts, major and minor.

There are zingers, those sentences that contain a wallop of wit and wisdom, stopping us in our tracks in every story. Here’s Briane emerging with forceps clamped to her skull as a 1950s newborn in the title story: “Everything was out of proportion, not the least of which, her potential. She contained two million eggs, her lifetime quota, or so her hypercritical husband, Oliver, said.”

We simply do not often read stories in contemporary literature with as much gritty depth and maturity as these by Debbie Bateman. When tackling marital ultimatums, say, or the profound impact of parental cowardice, this writer delivers with visceral honesty and a seemingly innate sense of pacing and diction. We readers are in the hands of a highly skilled writer, one who has served a long apprenticeship to debut with a collection as accomplished as this one. Brava!
Wakeland is tasked with finding the regular guys. In Sunset and Jericho and gangsters of crime fiction seem like an ironic narrative point of view projected by a cynical idealist whose career choice pervasively “enables” his personal flaws. Dave Wakeland might benefit from a few sessions with Vancouver behavioural psychologist Dr. Annick Boudreau, Charles Demers’ fictional amateur detective in Primary Obsessions (D&M, 2020) and Nooodly Dark (D&M, 2022). Maybe Wiebe and Demers will collaborate on a series “cross-over” here with Dr. Boudreau treating Wakeland for depression while they work on a case together... but I digress.

Wiebe borrows Chandler’s go-to plot device, used in The Big Sleep (1939) and The Long Goodbye (1953) lifted straight from the generic source, Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes: the stink-finger at “respectable” wealthy and powerful clients who hire private investigators because they’re being blackmailed or extorted by more wealthy and powerful clients who hire amateur detectives. Sam Wiebe brings a “Raymond Chandler-style” private eye into the 21st century.

In true Chandler fashion, Wakeland is a private investigator in the Vancouver Police Department. In Sunset and Jericho, Wakeland is tasked with finding the Mayor of Vancouver’s wasted “wasting away in Margaritaville” younger brother—a character who has mysteriously disappeared. Part of Wiebe’s success in “bringing Raymond Chandler into the 21st century” is achieved by not making Wakeland some shady shamus working out of a seedy office on the Downtown Eastside. These days, no PI working solo could make the rent on the cheap out of a seedy office on the Downtown Eastside. These days, no PI working solo could make the rent on the cheap. In Sunset and Jericho, Wiebe’s plotting is superb: he’s a solo could make the rent on the cheap.
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**The Berry Takes the Shape of the Bloom**
andrea bennett

The berry takes the shape of the bloom originated as a gesture towards optimism after loss and pain, difficulty and fear. These poems, which capture particular moments in time, may recur in any given present: sometimes what surfaces is anxiety or anger, sometimes love or eagerness.

978-1-77201-551-5; Poetry
Forthcoming August 29, 2023
A non-Indigenous teacher seeking redemption from a failed marriage and artistic career, faces doubt and mysterious goings-on at a remote First Nations school.

Borrowing from her earlier novel, Manuel categorizes outsiders who work on the Reserve as either “Users, Runners, or Saviours”—some already leapfrogging into better positions elsewhere; others wanting to escape their old life; some that yearn to feel good about “saving” First Nations people. Molleigh briefly considers whether she might be a little of all three. Beset by doubts in an unfamiliar environment rich in secrets, her test is to imagine what actually belonging to a place like Tawakin could involve. Teaching there means “trying to figure out how to out-teach the broken lines, the frowns, the fear.” Unaccountably, she’s also nervous about the forest surrounding her. She imagines returning to the city. Challenges begin when Molleigh is faced with a mercurial, possibly neurodivergent student, Hannah, whose pit-bull mother fends off any attempt at a medical evaluation. It’s an uneasy stalemate. For relief, Molleigh sketches portraits of her students that she hopes might inspire them someday to ideas beyond a life of fishing and logging.

Meanwhile, Mr. Chapman, the school principal and another new-comer, thinks that he brings hope. He jokes with students and believes people “become the stories they hear.” Experienced in Northern BC education, Chapman has a proprietary air with a patrician cadenced speaking style. Yet his personal life remains closed.

When an unsettling story arises about a nearby island that children are not allowed to visit, inevitably Molleigh is drawn into a taboo-breaking mission there. Manuel’s basic elements are now in play. Weird things happen, and Molleigh clicks in and out of an old, disturbing memory. There’s an intimation of possible sexual abuse, never specific, but a lingering suspicion. At a gathering, an elder with inner-seeing ability explains things, declaring there’s bad energy present, “dark...sharp as broken glass.”

It’s not for review to retell the story. Manuel’s prose kicks into overdrive with her accounts of typical daily incidents at Tawakin that are genuinely enlightening—a spooky tale for kids about The Basket Lady; the way an isolated community rallies in an emergency; how a schoolteacher learns from a pupil why children’s stories are make-believe, “Because they make you believe.” Then, after sorrow, there’s a traditional shell-gathering expedition where Molleigh connects with the village women, finding joy within their sadness—an event that leaves her questioning how she’d survive in any other place “where there is no marveling, no celebrating, no sharing.” And finally, there’s a shared secret and an answer; with problems like Hannah, does how a wavering teacher find a way to stay?

Good mysteries need false leads. Within an atmosphere permeated with myth and Indigeneity, Molleigh encounters her share. There’s the reality of unresolved trauma that can torment like a night-cramp. There’s a necessary cleansing (brought about because Molleigh does something inappropriate) that some may find believable and confusing. Credible endings often need a villain and a means of knotting things together, but not everything follows that maxim in this tale; there’s deep beauty and a waft of “feel-good” atmosphere between people is like that, “a wind that has to trade both ways if it’s to succeed.”

In post-colonial times, any work by a non-Indigenous author addressing or portraying First Nations peoples and their cultures is bound to receive a nuanced regard for the protocols of sharing First Nations imagery from life along the coast. We’ve got a storyteller in control of her materials.

Foregrounding all this is Tawakin’s Indigenous difference. Entering into the story is the novel’s 39-year-old schoolteacher protagonist from suburban Vancouver, Molleigh Royston. From the inclusion of Nuu-chah-nulth language phrasings that one receives during childhood, to the intimidating darkness of the omnipresent forest surrounding her, life as a teacher among the hundred souls of this fishing village, Molleigh intuits, also obliges being a learner.

In post-colonial times, any work by a non-Indigenous author addressing or portraying First Nations peoples and their cultures is bound to receive a critical eye. Yet, if we look beyond knee-jerk dissonance to a deeper understanding of BC’s colonial legacy and the manifold hurts, we’re likely to find messages of significance in this quintessential West Coast story. There will be pain, yes, often the legacy of a grim colonial history; yet readers can expect authentic portraits of real communal joy as well, especially among the women and elders of Tawakin, and of an everyday resilience in the face of marginal economic circumstances.

Molleigh has been there just over a month. She has seen a seven-year marriage collapse and her prior artistic career fall to ignoble. Her possessions are a scattering of cardboard boxes. Teaching, she admits, was “a late career choice.” In Indigenous communities like Tawakin, she realizes, it means “being on call twenty-four hours a day.” Chase Charlie, a roustabout character from Manuel’s earlier novel, expresses it from his point of view, “Teachers always leave, will you stay?”

Like a memory box, it yields a rich jumbled trove: verse, prose, family photos and art. Yet this book was not written merely to illustrate a life in all its richness, even if that is a benefit for the attentive reader. Its intentions are deadly serious: to take back the author’s life and reclaim her traditional language through rewriting, reappraisal and outright sabotage. The threads that stitch these lines, paragraphs and stanzas together are made of gut: a gut steeped in mother’s blood and cured with a daughter’s tears.

The subjects of Spells’ poems include John-Kehewin’s Indigenous Cree identity, her childhood, motherhood, relationships to her family, lovers, friends, Catholicism, intergenerational trauma, COVID-19 experiences and the past to which she is deeply connected by blood if not experience. Despite the intensely personal nature of the events recollected and chronicled in these verses, there are strategies in this book that invite the reader into the poet’s experience. A timeline at the beginning of the book reminded me, in a completely different context, of that cast of characters one finds at the beginning of a classic detective novel, hoping vainly to figure out who the killer is before even reading the first page.

Including this timeline was a wise choice. Studying it helps the reader to figure out who the killer is before even reading the first poem. It’s colonialism. A timeline at the beginning of the book reminded me, in a completely different context, of that cast of characters one finds at the beginning of a classic detective novel, hoping vainly to figure out who the killer is before even reading the first page.

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in the midst of parenthood, will smile and perhaps wince, recognizing the child’s unavailing attempts to turn her mother’s attention from the poem back to her.

Tragedy is never far from these pages, however. An essay in the middle of the book, “Heartbeat of the Drum Calls Us Home—Not Everyone Hears It” is an extended description of, and discussion with, a fellow mother who bolstered John-Kehewin during her first faltering years as a parent; who John-Kehewin thought lost but who resurfaces with her own child, now grown, to reminisce about early parenting years.

There is an easiness to this essay that provides a resting space amidst the justified urgency of the poems. Yet the lessons here also reverberate with the experiences John-Kehewin shares elsewhere. Her friend tells the story of how she took her young son to a powwow, where he excitedly demanded to dance. Not knowing the protocol, the mother floundered. Like John-Kehewin, she was raised not by her own relations, but in foster care, so her connection to her cultural heritage has to be remade through her own determination. But like the poet, she has come through and out the other side, proclaiming—as does this collection in myriad ways—“It’s a good day to be Indian.”

Mara D hostile is an extended family stay; Portugal, 62/22 episodes, adventure and the search for home.

How to Clean a Fish: And Other Adventures in Portugal

Walking the Camino: On Earth As It Is

Maryanna Gabriel

Winner Pottersfield Press Prize
Nimbus Publishing, 2023

A story of the transformative power of pilgrimage and the healing power it yields.

Top-Grade Arabica Coffees Roasted In The Shop.

Joy & Sorrow

Musings on Mining, Family, Latin America & Society

Playful, jubilant, calm and wise — Peter Sean Daly’s poems describe the quiet heroism of everyday labourers from Vancouver to the El Mochito Mine in Honduras.

20 plus varieties

From Salt Spring Island to Santiago

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TEENS AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Four teens uncover an oil magnate’s misrepresentation of scientific recommendations at a conference in Pender Harbour, on B.C.’s coast. Corporate profits overrule climate mitigation. He must be stopped! But how?

Readers will learn of corruption in high places. Pender Harbour’s Secret Agents and two subsequent books (Secret Agents’ Dutch Treat and Secret Agents Defang a Dragon) suggest ways to counter such fraudulence with imagination, courage, and ingenuity.

All three Secret Agent stories are available across Canada through Red Tuque Books: www.redtuquebooks.com

Suggested retail price $19.95

Linda Richards shared my passion and filled her bedroom with posters and statues of horses — only she managed to have at least part of her wish come true because one day “Bonnie” arrived on her family’s property in Langley, BC. Richards cautiously bonded with the horse, which she believed was wild, and managed to “tame” Bonnie enough to climb onto her back for a ride. And even though it turned out that Bonnie wasn’t a wild horse (and wasn’t an animal she could keep), that experience helped firm up her devotion to learning more about these beautiful creatures who still run free in a few special places around the world.

With 16 books to her credit, as well as experience as the president of Vancouver’s long-standing Self-Counsel Press, Richards has clearly learned to do thorough research and this book reflects the depth of her commitment.

She begins by offering information about horses in general. For example, I certainly didn’t know about the mobility of their eyes or ears, or the limitations of the spectrum of light that’s visible to them. She then goes on with a history of Equus, the horse family’s scientific name, examining it right down to the various surviving strands of DNA. She also helps us distinguish between the terms “wild” and “feral” which she says are often applied incorrectly.

But readers shouldn’t shy away with thoughts that this book is overly scientific. Part of the Orca Wild series, its intended audience is middle-grade readers although the colour photos on every page are enough to lure much younger readers into turning these pages. And, as I’ve already admitted, I learned a number of things while reading this.

Numerous sidebars, dense with information, appear frequently — though I did find that some of them didn’t exactly fit with the text they were meant to amplify. Nonetheless, they present such an interesting array of facts — everything from vocabulary specific to horses (wors indicating age and gender, or terms for their various colours) to what determines a pony as opposed to a horse.

Richards also deals with several delicate issues about wild horses. One, their origins. While some claim horses were brought to North America by explorers from Europe, others say they migrated much earlier across what was then a land bridge connecting Asia and North America. Further, many Indigenous Peoples hold the horse as sacred and believe that horses have always been on the North American continent.

Another contentious issue which Richards addresses head-on is what the fate of wild horses should be. She seems to not be altogether outside with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), a branch of the US Department of the Interior. This is the branch of government that’s in charge of public lands, the lands on which a number of wild horses still live.

In some ways it seems that the BLM is at the mercy of several groups: those who claim wild horses “...are bad for the environment, that they eat too much of the grass that deer or cattle or various other species need to eat, that there are too many of them.” Others contend, with some evidence, that horses can be good for the environment by helping prevent wildfires when they clear out vegetation that might serve as tinder. There are also economic benefits to tourism from having wild horses in a protected area. Other countries have found wild horses are beneficial, especially as is noted in a sidebar about a practice called “conservation grazing” now used in England and other parts of the United Kingdom.

In areas that seek to control wild horse populations, the options for dealing with them range from rounding the horses up (often with helicopters) to leaving them alone, to administering chemical birth control measures.

Richards offers hope for solutions — not only with the challenging-sounding proposal to adopt a wild horse, but also with stories of changes that have come about from letter-writing campaigns, letters that were often written by children. She includes a glossary and a list of further resources, both in print and online.

This clearly-written and well-researched book holds more information than most of us could absorb in a single reading. It encourages us to browse around, maybe something like the grazing style of a wild horse, digesting what we learn as we proceed. For any girl or boy wanting to learn more about horses (or maybe to do research for a science fair project), they couldn’t ask for a better starting point. 0781459622396

Heidi Greco still admires the beauty of horses, but doesn’t often get the chance to see one up-close, in-person.

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Linda Richards aged 12 with the “wild” horse she befriended and named Bonnie.
A IS FOR ARNOTT
Viking enthusiast Bill Arnott has published his third travelogue about following in the footsteps of these historical voyagers and pillagers, Gone Viking III: The Holy Grail (Hamish Hamilton, 2009). Granted a fellowship by London’s Royal Geographical Society for his two previous Gone Viking travelogues, Arnott finds new adventures and mysteries to unravel from across Europe, through Scandinavia and into the Arctic. He even introduces new Viking research from Poland and the city of Jerusalem.

B IS FOR LEBLANC
In a multi-generational novel spanning hundreds of years, Judy LeBlanc brings to life the Expulsion of the Acadians (1755–1764) and the trauma that lives on in their descendants in The Broken Heart of Winter (CanLit $24.95). Expelled by the British from the lands and homes these French immigrants had cultivated for a century, the Acadians were sent into exile by the thousands. The ensuing tragedy is told through the historical story of one of the Acadian families, and bookended by the contemporary story of their descendants. Demonstrating the resilience of refugees, the three main characters—all women—adapt and carry on despite the traumas they face.

C IS FOR CRAM
A child of the ’60s, Elizabeth Squire has a complex and difficult relationship with her mother, Margaret, in the novel Once Upon an Effing Time (D&M $24.95) by Buffy Cram of Salt Spring Island. Margaret leaves Ontario and takes Elizabeth with her on a life journey that sometimes includes criminal misadventures. Yet Elizabeth tries to remain close to the neglectful, conspiracy-loving Margaret. It leads Elizabeth to adopt personas and live multiple lives, such as transforming into a fortune-teller who speaks in Dylan lyrics, and joining an American hippie doomsday cult. Buffy Cram grew up in a communal housing project on the tip of Vancouver Island and earned an MFA in creative writing from UBC.

D IS FOR DIANA
In her poetry volume Sapphire and the Hollow Bone (Ekstasis $23.95), Diana Hayes of Salt Spring Island addresses the heartbreak of losing her much-loved mother and reflects on nature and time. According to fellow poet, Patrick Friesen, “Hayes uses the music of myth and the mystical to bring us to the sheer curtain between us and the natural world, which she refers to as ‘holy earth and the wild absence of time.’ And she parts the curtain, by paying full attention to nature and its relentless motion so that we can occasionally stop time, marvel at change, and see.”

E IS FOR ENNS
In her fourth poetry collection, Dislocations (U. of Regina Press $19.95), Karen Enns’ verses are a lyrical journey through the seasons and the weather—all the while observing human and “otherly” things in nature such as stars, roses, deer, fire, grass, gulls and light and darkness. There’s deep investigation into the symbolism of words, particularly in the book section that outlines ten “dislocations,” the eighth of which reads: “To imagine a colour no one has seen. / And then / white anemones among the cedar.”
H IS FOR HUNDAL

On her first day at a new school, Stacy (shorthand for Anastasia), meets three other girls (Renka, Fayre and Hali) who, like Stacy, have learning disabilities, in Stacy and the Magic List (Rivel Mountain $13.95), a middle-grade novel by Nancy Hundal. The four become friends when they learn they also share special secret qualities. The story is told through internal monologues of the four girls, highlighting the many difficulties young teens have fitting in. Hundal is a retired teacher-librarian, and she has written twelve books for young people. Her first Children’s book, I Heard My Mother Call My Name (HarperCollins, 1990) was awarded the Sheila A. Egoff BC Book Prize in 1991.

K IS FOR KALTEIS

Already a critically acclaimed author of ten books, Dietrich Kalteis is back on the scene with The Get: A Crime Novel (ECW $26.95). His first novel was released in 2014, and his most recent book won the Crime Writers of Canada Award for Best Crime Novel in 2022. In The Get, Kalteis pens a graphic description of Toronto in the 1960s where the protagonist, Lenny Ovitz, wrangles with unsavoury characters, a fierce crime boss and his own wife.

L IS FOR LEE

As a trans activist, educator and author, Tash McAdam creates stories that speak to those who often find themselves on the sidelines of representation. In their latest book, Airlock (Orca $10.95), McAdam blends their own lived experience with that of the protagonist, Brick, a non-binary teen living on a futuristic version of Earth. Airlock is a suspenseful and action-packed space adventure where Brick faces off against authority,pirates and their own anxiety. McAdam’s background in computer science and karate helps bring their sci-fi stories to life, and the hi-lo structure of their novel make it both inclusive and accessible for young readers.

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Selected by BC BookWorld
N IS FOR NAWROCKI

East Vancouver–born Norman Nawrocki has released two books: Red Squared Montreal (Black Rose Books $20), a novel about the 2012 mass student strike that rocked Quebec, told through the eyes of a student striker; and Isabelle Walks With Angels: A Montreal Urban Legend (Les Pages Noires $24.99), an illustrated magical tale about a despairing woman who encounters extraordinary happenings when she meets an all-women biker gang. Nawrocki will launch both books Saturday, September 16, at People’s Co-op Bookstore in Vancouver.

O IS FOR OOLICHAN

Author Samantha Beynon and illustrator Lucy Trimble were recognized at the sixth annual Indigenous Voices Awards (IVAs) for their picture book for children, Oolichan Moon (Harbour $24.95). The story is about the passing down of knowledge from Nisga’a Elders and the sacredness of traditional foods, particularly the oolichan fish—teaching us to only take what is needed and to give something back.

P IS FOR PECK

Frances Peck’s second novel, Uncontrolled Flight (NeWest $24.95), takes place during a BC wildfire (an earth-quake in Vancouver was the backdrop for her first novel) when an experienced firefighting pilot crashes his airplane. The aftermath deals with the dead pilot’s grieving wife, a younger pilot he was mentoring and an accident investigator with a dangerous secret. This page-turner delves into the emotional lives of people and “the ways we try to conceal and redeem our lives,” says publicity. Peck’s debut novel was The Broken Places (NeWest, 2022).

Q IS FOR QUON

A disabled writer living in the Okanagan Valley, Sally Quon has published a collection of poems, Beauty Born of Pain (Okanagan Publishing House $23.99), containing four groupings. “Secrets” details the experience of an abusive marriage. “Echoes” is about the return of childhood memories once free of the hurtful relationship. “Damage” is about the lingering effects of the past on mind and body. The final section, “Recovery,” is about moving forward with hope and healing.

S IS FOR SETHEN

Surrey’s Harpreet Singh Sekha writes in Punjabi about gender inequality, social justice, and the immigrant experience. His short story collection Pram (Ekstasis $24.95), recently translated into English, tells of an Indo Canadian woman earning money as a prostitute in order to open a clothing store; a Punjabi husband taking on house and child caring duties because his wife earns more than he does; a Punjabi mother worried about her son being raised by her husband, who is not the biological father; and others. Pram garnered critical recognition and was named a finalist for the Dhahan Prize in Punjabi Literature.

T IS FOR THESEN

Sharon Thesen has lived most of her life in BC and has written 12 books of poetry, of which three were finalists for Governor General’s Awards. Re-fabulations: Selected Longer Poems (Talonbooks $24.95) is a collection from her oeuvre ranging from her first book, published in 1980, to today. In an interview included in the book, Thesen says of a poetry-filled life: “Really that’s the desire and it’s what I live, what we share and where we can meet; a life in poetry, and not a ‘career’ in it.”

IAN THOMAS

Winner of the 2023 Raven Chapbooks Contest

“Green Islands presents a thrilling fusion of the finely observed and the visionary poetic…. abundant with lines that leap, ringing, in the mind and the body, long after they are read.” -judges’ citation

2024 POETRY CONTEST CALLING ALL B.C. POETS!

This year, the Raven Chapbooks Poetry Contest is open to all emerging and established poets living in B.C. Full description and contest guidelines available on the website: ravenchapbooks.ca

We are pleased to announce the 2023 contest judges, Mary Ann Moore and Ursula Vaira. Entries must be received by November 30, 2023. Manuscripts are blind judged—winner will be announced March 1 and published June 2024.
The third volume of Robert Amos’ series on BC artist E.J. Hughes (1913 – 2007) covers the period of Hughes’ service in the Second World War. Hughes became Canada’s first, last and longest-serving War Artist of this conflict. He was also the most prolific. The book features seventy artworks from the Canadian War Museum’s holdings, expanded with many personal photos and sketches from the artist’s papers. The narrative situates Hughes’ wartime work within the broader context of his life and his development as an artist. With the care and knowledge of a fellow artist, Amos draws the reader into this important chapter in the life of E. J. Hughes and Canadian art.

**SHORTLISTED TITLES**

Wilson Duff: Coming Back, a Life (Harbour Publishing) by Robin Fisher
Chinese Victoria: A Long and Difficult Journey (Discover the Past) by John Adams
U IS FOR UP

Jules Sherred of Duncan works as a commercial food photographer and stylist, writer, journalist and outspoken advocate for disability and trans rights. He created the Disabled Kitchen and Garden website and has published Chip Up the Kitchen: Tools, Tips and Recipes for the Disabled Cook (Touchwood $35) to include disabled and neurodivergent people in the conversation around food. With 50 recipes that make use of three key tools—the electric pressure cooker, air fryer and bread machine—Sherred’s book aims to make the kitchen accessible and enjoyable.

V IS FOR VALERIE

The undertold story of Black Vancouver—Harry Jerome, who set several world records earning him the title of the world’s fastest man in the 1950s and 60s, is now chronicled in Races: The Trials & Triumphs of Canada’s Fastest Family (Goose Lane $24.95) by his sister Valerie Jerome, also an Olympic athlete. They accomplished these feats during an era of overt and violent racism. “It’s time Canadians knew the truth,” writes Valerie Jerome. Whether certain people, places or things—Tom Cruise, Mexico and microwaves—are winners or losers, has collaborated again. Do you mind if I sit here? (Talonbooks $16.95), due out December 2023, is set in Vancouver 30 years from now. Three social planners attempt to repurpose the long-abandoned Russian Hall in Kitsilano for common use but are thwarted by a squatter in the building.

W IS FOR WEBSTAD

Phyllis Webstad

The founder of Orange Shirt Day and an Indigenous survivor of the Canadian residential school system, Phyllis Webstad has released the kidlit picture book Every Child Matters (Medicine Wheel $24.99). The story details Webstad’s harrowing experience at residential school. Indigenous children were taught they did not matter, but Webstad seeks to turn the page on intergenerational trauma and promote healing. With illustrations by Karlene Harvey, Every Child Matters tells of the impact of the residential school system, while emphasizing the importance of culture, reconciliation and resilience.

X IS FOR EXPEDITION

A leg injury left Bronwyn Preece with a severely crooked knee, but it didn’t stop her from taking a grueling two-week horse expedition through the isolated wilderness of Muskwa-Kechika in northeast BC, as she relates in her ode to backcountry beauty: knee deep in high water: riding the Muskwa-Kechika, expedition poems (Caillín $20), “Packing pepperoni, power bars and painkillers,” Preece muses on her role as a settler and her fragility and strength in this land of melting mountains and rising rivers. 9781778540165

Y IS FOR YOUSSEF

Marcus Youssef and James Long, co-writers of Winners and Losers (Talonbooks, 2015), a bestselling play about two men from different backgrounds arguing about
Every child can love reading, they just need the right story to spark their passion. From board books and Early Readers to YA and graphic novels, we have a room full of carefully-selected titles. Start their story in The Children’s Bookshop at Tanner’s Books.

"Children are made readers on the laps of their parents.”
- Emilie Buchwald

Tanglewood Books, located in a heritage building at 2306 West Broadway on the corner of Vine Street, is an Aladdin’s cave of new and used books. We can get your special orders to you within 4 business days, we have a popular and unusual DVD collection, as well as some rare vinyl thrown into the mix.

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Sun: 12pm to 6pm

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Robin Fisher won the 2022 Lieutenant Governor’s Medal for Historical Writing for Wilson Duff: Canada Book, 4 Life (Harbour). Lessons in Legitimacy: Colonialism, Capitalism, and the Rise of State Schooling in British Columbia (UBC Press) by Sean Carleton won the Canadian Historical Association’s Clio Prize and came in 2nd for the 2022 Lieutenant Governor’s Medal for Historical Writing, Heroin: An Illustrated History (Fernwood) by Susan Boyd and designed by David Lester was shortlisted for the Mary Scofer Award for Best Book by a Manitoba Publisher.

At the Western Canada Jewish Book Awards, the Pinksky Givin’ Family Prize (non-fiction) went to Alan Twigg, editor of Tidal.

The Unusual Friendship of Yosef Yask and Tim Gidal (DM) by Tom Stewart of Tofino was shortlisted for a Whistler Independent Book Award (WIBA) in fiction for Immortal North (Lucky Dog). Chief Robert Joseph was shortlisted for a WIBA in non-fiction for NamuSugat: We Are All One (Page Two). J. Pham-Freter of Richmond was shortlisted for a WIBA in children’s literature for The Last Green Dragon (Your Nickel’s Worth).

Baldrey’s BOOK SHELF

During the COVID-19 pandemic when working remotely became common, Keith Baldrey, Global BC TV legislative bureau chief and one of BC’s best known political commentators, started reporting from his basement. With nothing but a window with bars and a blank wall as a backdrop, Baldrey had a friend jokingly ask if he was reporting from prison. When unofficial ratings for backdrops started popping up on the internet, Baldrey quipped what would good broadcasts look like and that he too could get a good rating. When advised that a bookshelf and a plant would help, he hastily put together the props. Someone noticed Baldrey had a BC-authored book on his shelf, and suddenly authors and publishers from around the province began sending their books to him. One author even flew to Victoria specifically to deliver his new publication to Baldrey. He continues to display BC books on his bookshelf, frequently rotating in new titles. Viewers now tune into his broadcasts to get the latest BC political news and catch sight of the current BC titles on Baldrey’s bookshelf.

Abrazax Books turns 30

Abrazax Books on Denman Island celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. The current owner—artist Francesca Barker (above)—locally known as Tachi—is the second generation of her family to operate the store. She added a coffee shop and café in 2020, making the bookstore a hub for local writers, artists and community groups, as well as visitors to the island. Is a third generation waiting in the wings?
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