Simon Says Newsletter

Simon Fraser University Retirees Association www.sfu.ca/retirees Summer 2025

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Lots of Flies Around the Slaughterhouse

JOHN H. BORDEN

Safu, our Ethiopian driver came back later in the afternoon and said, "There are lots of flies around the slaughterhouse." But let's backtrack to the beginning of this story.

In the fall of 1985, my phone in SFU's Department of Biological Sciences rang. I picked up and gave my usual response. "John Borden speaking." In the US Marine Corps, I spent four years growing up there, I would have said "Corporal Borden speaking, Sir." My ear hurt as a booming voice on the other end of the line bellowed "This is Al App[1] of the United Nations Development Programme. How would you like to go to Arizona?"

At the time, the desert locust was in the midst of a major outbreak and was defoliating much of the African Sahel. A University of Arizona chemist in the Department of Entomology had contacted the United Nations claiming that he had the solution. He had found a rare species of grass in the Arizona desert that synthesized a mimic of insect juvenile hormone, which promotes juvenility in insects. If an immature insect is exposed to an excess of juvenile hormone (or a suitable mimic), the ingested substance will combine with the insect's own juvenile hormone to overpower the growth and molting hormone. Molting will be disrupted, and the insect will die. The misguided professor proposed planting this grass throughout North Africa to kill those pesky locusts. He did not realize that every native grass-feeding insect would also die, and an ecological disaster would follow.

To appease the errant chemist, the UNDP agreed to hold an international desert locust workshop in Tucson, where his proposal would be considered. Being a forest entomologist from British Columbia, I knew very little about the desert locust, but my department Chair, Karun Nair[2], was on sabbatical at the University of Arizona at that time, and because of my knowledge of pest management he suggested that I be invited. I did my homework and made a presentation outlining the desert locust life cycle, identifying points of vulnerability that could potentially be exploited in controlling the pest. Among my hypotheses were that yet unknown pheromones could be involved in mediating aggregation, mating and the physiological changes involved in conversion from the solitarius phase to the gregarious phase in which swarms of locusts migrate from west to east, denuding the landscape. They usually end up on the Arabian Peninsula where they are known as "shrimp from the sky" and are a periodic delicacy on the dinner table. Among the attentive listeners was Tom Odhiambo[3], a member of the Luo Tribe in western Kenya, a heritage shared with US President Barak Obama. Tom was a Cambridge educated insect physiologist, and notable scoundrel, who had founded the International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology in Duduville (Insectville in Swahili) on the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya.

PHOTO: FLIES / TOBIAS ROTH / UNSPASH,

I went home thinking "well, that was fun", but it's back to the BC woods for me. And then my phone rang again. "This is Al App" the phone bellowed as I held it away from my ear. "How would you like to go to Rome?" To paraphrase Sally Fields, it turned out that they liked me, they really liked me. I was asked to join a joint advisory council of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the UNDP to assist in administering a Desert Locust Research Program. The program would circumvent still prevalent scientific colonialism and would be run mainly by African scientists working in Africa. So off I went to Rome flying Business Class on CP Air, a UN perk granted to anyone whose trip in the air lasted more than nine hours. Dinner that night started with a shrimp cocktail served on salal leaves. I'm certain that I was the only one on that flight who knew that the species name of the deep green leaves that so nicely highlighted the pink shrimp is *Gaultheria shallon*.

The council met in the outrageous and venerable FAO building, built by Mussolini, and notable for its palatial tiled

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SimonSays

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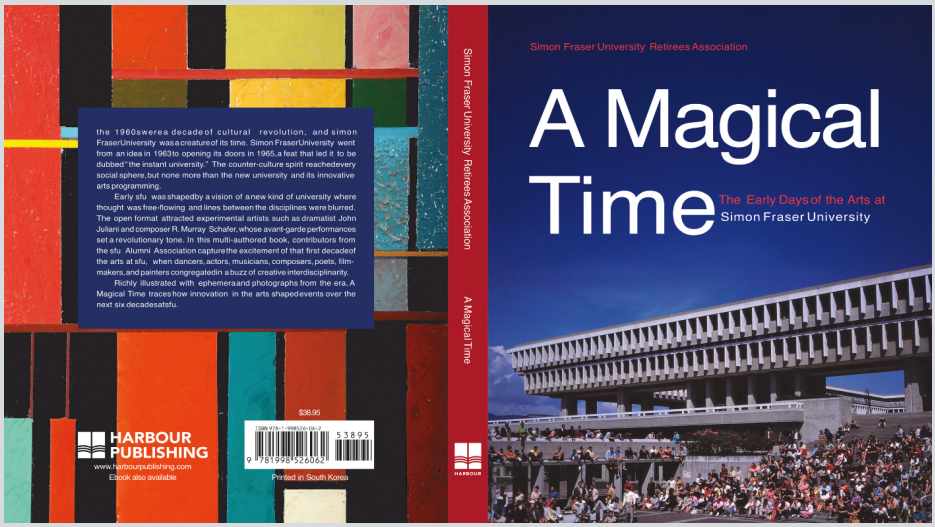
President's Report

The **SFURA**'s book, *A Magical Time: The Early Days of the Arts at SFU*, was recently published and it looks great. The book can be purchased directly from Harbour Publishing. Alternatively, it can be purchased at a book launch, the first of which will take place on June 3rd, SFU Downtown. Here is the Eventbrite link: https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/book-launch-a-magical-time-tickets-1324589866949. A third option for purchasing the book is from the SFU Bookstore.



Our next **SFURA** dinner will take place on June 25th at the Diamond Alumni Centre on Burnaby campus. This event will launch our new **SFURA** scholarship for first-generation graduate students. Many of our members were first-generation graduate students themselves and understand the complexities of navigating the expectations and culture while also explaining the value of grad school to your family and trying to keep yourself alive and healthy. **SFURA** will be matching the first $5,000 donated to the scholarship. A ***donation link*** can be found on our www.sfu.ca/retirees website. In addition, the Arts book will be available at the dinner for $30 for each copy. All profits from book sales will be donated to the scholarship. Feel free to invite your fellow SFU retirees to join you at this dinner. An Eventbrite link for the dinner will be emailed soon, as of time of writing.

Our *Guide to Extended Health Care and Travel Insurance Plans for SFU Retirees* was recently updated in February 2025, thanks to Jay Burr. This comprehensive guide covers extended health and travel insurance options available to SFU retiree groups. See https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/Travel_and_Health_Insurance.html.

SFU Human Resources has just agreed to amend a practice that did not allow new spouses to be added to the Pacific Blue Cross extended health plan for retirees. **SFURA** initiated an inquiry and was able to pursue a change to the existing protocol. We have now received confirmation that adding a new spouse is allowed. Contact Human Resources at pensions@sfu.ca if you wish to pursue this.

As well, our membership in **CURAC** (College and University Retiree Associations of Canada) means that you can obtain the member benefits that they have arranged. They have recently added Specsavers and are about to add Hearing Life to that list. More information can be found at www.sfu.ca/retirees/curac.html (Full disclosure: **SFURA** receives 2.5% of any spending via **CURAC**, which adds up to about $500 a year. If this amount increases, we will be using the funds towards events and other **SFURA** membership priorities.)

Finally, we are looking for ***ideas for summertime events*** for our members. Last year some of our board members organized a summer picnic in Confederation Park in North Burnaby. If you have any thoughts or suggestions, please feel free to contact us by email to retirees@sfu.ca..

Best
Frances Atkinson

Convocation Ambassadors Needed

Convocation is a significant milestone for SFU graduands and their families. This spring, from **June 9 – 13**, you have the chance to play a role in making convocation truly remarkable. As a Convocation Ambassador, you'll be part of the behind-the-scenes team that ensures the celebrations run smoothly. Explore the various roles available and register today to be part of the experience. Visit www.sfu.ca/convocation/ambassadors to join the team!

PHOTO: RON LONG

EVELYN PALMER

In this edition of 'Simon Says', we will miss the eagle eyes and great skill of **Evelyn Palmer**, one of the critical members of the team. Evelyn passed away on February 10, 2025. She was too ill to proof read the previous Fall edition, but we hoped that she would recover and join us for this one. That was not to be. Publishing the newsletter is a joint effort that relies on the talents and dedication of volunteers. Evelyn's precision and patience were key to enhancing its appealing professional appearance. She never missed an errant comma, an absent word or italics that should not have been! She often pored through an edition three or more times. Just to get it right.

In addition to assuming the proofreading task, Evelyn, who had been at SFU since the early days, was deeply involved in many other activities, from the Alumni Association to oral history projects for the SFU Retirees Association to founding a Speaker's Series of noon-time lectures. SFURA president Frances Atkinson wrote in February: "Evelyn wanted history to be preserved – not just the official history that is kept in the Archives, but the history in the memories of those that lived it."

For those of us in love with history, we know that this elevation of the memories of everyday life is one of its most important gifts. Evelyn had an impact on the university and on this newsletter that was invaluable and she will be difficult, impossible, really, to replace. We will remember Evelyn fondly, with appreciation for all she contributed.

The *Simon Says* Team

WWW.SFU.CA/RETIREES

PAINTING: OLD COUPLE AT LAUNDRY, LARGE ACRYLIC ON CANVAS / MARILYN BOWMAN, 2025

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bathrooms. One of the agenda items for this first meeting was a $5 million research proposal from International Centre for Insect Physiology (ICIPE) for research on desert locust pheromones. Perhaps not surprisingly the hypotheses presented in the proposal were remarkably similar to the ones I had formulated in the Arizona workshop. But the science was sound even if the budget was excessive and of course included the acknowledged 20% that would be skimmed off the top and never accounted for. The proposal was presented orally by an outstanding chemist and chemical ecologist named Ahmed Hassanali[4], who is the only person I have ever met who was born in Zanzibar. Dr. App assigned me the job of conveying to him that the budget was unrealistic. I did so with some trepidation, but was astonished when his face broke into a wide smile. "I am so relieved," he said. It turned out that he neither approved of nor wanted a cut of the 20% skimmed off the top. He even said that the remaining request was more than they needed. With full knowledge that Dr. Odhiambo would not be pleased, we pared down the budget by half over a three-year period. And I was given the job of chairing a three-person subcommittee to oversee the program.

> *"He was a handful, because the British Empire still lived in his every fiber, and he was not hesitant in letting any and all Africans within earshot know that they were inferior beings still living in the colonies."*

I recruited my SFU chemist colleague Keith Slessor[5] to join the group, and the third member was an ancient British entomologist by the name of Peter Haskell[6], who knew everything there was to be known about the desert locust. He was a handful, because the British Empire still lived in his every fiber, and he was not hesitant in letting any and all Africans within earshot know that they were inferior beings still living in the colonies. He viewed Canadians only slightly more favorably.

So off we went to Africa. We worked hard the first visit, actively participating in developing experimental projects and guiding formulation of a detailed budget. Keith and I both gave seminars which established our scientific bona fides, and I made a point of impressing on the locust research team that we would be hard-ass, but fair evaluators.

After five full days, one of the ICIPE research scientists arranged for Keith and I to go 'on safari' to Masi Mara. Actually, a cousin of his did the arrangements, because in Africa everyone has such a "cousin" who does the work and gets a cut. In our case we got the African price, which was much lower than if we had booked from North America. It came with our own vehicle and driver, and we stayed in luxury

PHOTO: HERD-OF-CATTLE, AFRICA / HANNA GRACE / UNSPLASH

digs in the Great Rift Valley and ate gourmet food. One let down, however, was the Kenyan wine, which I charitably described as "harsh."

We saw four of the big-five beasts (buffalo, lions, leopards, rhinoceros) to check off our bucket list, missing only elephants. My favorite animals, however, were the baboons who populated the "left-right road" leading from the high plains of central Kenya precipitously down into the valley below. Built pre-war by the Italians and poorly maintained ever since, the road was stricken with huge potholes that were impossible to drive through, necessitating driving on the left or the right side of the road wherever a stretch of passable pavement remained. These impediments, as well as quite a bit of traffic, slowed the large lorries crawling up the hill from Uganda, laden with freshly harvested corn destined for the market in Nairobi. With remarkable division of labour, two teams of baboons camped out at the slowest points. The marauder team members hopped up onto the lorries, climbed into the open bins and threw out ears of corn for the ground team to sweep up and carry into the bush. The baboons on the trucks knew exactly when the lorries could speed up and they quickly de-trucked and joined the ground crew for the night's feast.

Back home the following winter, I attended a gathering where I had a chance to talk with graduate student Tsedeke Abate[7], who would soon return to Ethiopia with a PhD: not bad for a kid who didn't start school until he was 14. We talked about African insects and how they were managed, and he told me that in Ethiopia people tore leafy branches off the pepper tree and balanced them on their heads to ward off flies. At meals, they would place leaves or peppercorn berries on the table for the same purpose. Excitedly, I asked if anyone had proven scientifically that the repellency was real. No one had, so Keith and I arranged to conduct a little research project with Tsedeke after we were through with our next visit to ICIPE in neighboring Kenya.

The second visit to ICIPE was gratifying. The project was going well, with numerous important discoveries. Our hard-ass persona had paid off. The budget was spent as proposed, with no skimming, which we verified. We met with new hires who had been listed in the budget, and the corn crusher, justified as needed to prepare food for laboratory locusts, actually sat on a counter.

Five days later, after a short flight, Keith and I landed in Addis. The cognoscenti never use the full name of Addis Ababa, and we quickly learned to fake it. We were met by Tsedke and his driver Safu, and we travelled across the high plains to Nazareth, site of the national agricultural research laboratory.

After a good night's sleep in a rather primitive hotel made

livable by the fact that water came out of the taps and the toilets actually flushed, we were picked up by Safu bright and early the next morning. At that point, we had no firm experimental design, let alone materials and supplies. I suggested that we find a foodstuff that was attractive to flies, and that we have an untreated control along with treatments in which the foodstuff would be presented along with either pepper tree leaves or berries or extracts thereof. Like the Indian jacaranda tree, the Central and South American pepper tree is well established in Africa. Many grew on the grounds of the research station. Leaves and berries were plentiful, so that was no problem. Making the extracts, however, was. Eventually, we found a mortar and pestle in a cupboard and were able to procure some ethanol from a very meager storeroom. I let Keith make the extracts, which was probably the simplest chemistry he had done since Grade Three.

Then Tedeke got dinner plates from the canteen along with some moist Ethiopian unleavened bread, pea sauce and fermented milk, assuring us that flies really liked all three. We set the five fly dinner plates spaced 2 m apart on the ground outside the canteen, and we sat on stools with clicker counters in our hands to count the flies that landed to feed. One of us observed three plates and the others had two each. We set a limit of 10 flies landing or 10 minutes for the completion of a replicate. We soon attracted a crowd. Two pale white foreigners and an Ethiopian sitting on stools intently watching dinner plates lying on the ground, piled high with bread, pea sauce and fermented milk, was not an every-day sight. No-one said anything, but we could hear an occasional snicker from the onlookers.

It soon became apparent that we had a significant problem. Not a single fly landed on any plate, not even the control plate with no leaves, berries or extract. Contrary to popular opinion, in many parts of Africa flies are not that prevalent, and this was one of them. So, we called Safu over, and Tsedke told him to drive into town and not come back until he found a place with lots of flies. Safu came back later in the afternoon and said, "There are lots of flies around the slaughterhouse."

The next morning, we got everything together and set off for the slaughterhouse. Now, this was not your typical North American slaughterhouse. A forlorn little stone shack with a tin roof sat in the middle of a grassy compound, about 50 m by 50 m. The compound was surrounded by a high stone wall with open gates in both the front and the back. The plain outside the compound was strewn with all manner of bones, the remains of meals dragged from the premises by hyenas. At the front of the shack was a small corral holding an assortment of animals, from goats to miniature bony Ethiopian horses. At the back was a cement pad surrounded on the three exposed sides by a foul-smelling ditch.

Safu was right. There was no shortage of flies. Maximizing our chances of obtaining valuable data, we set the dinner plates in the ditch. There was a sizable manure pile in front of the shack, so we added a manure topping to the moist Ethiopian bread, pea sauce and fermented milk. We sat on our stools with our clicker counters, while the sun grew hotter and hotter. From time to time plaintive bleating or squeals could be heard from inside the shack, followed abruptly by silence.

The experiment worked. Very few flies landed on dishes with peppertree leaves, berries or extracts and lots of flies landed on the foodstuff-manure control plate. After finishing a replicate, we replaced the foodstuff and manure with a fresh batch and treated the plates with fresh leaves, berries or extracts. The data later became the basis for a master's thesis research project by one of Keith's students.

As the sun became even hotter, we began to feel a bit queasy. The pervasive odour might have contributed somewhat to our malaise. At one point at the end of a replicate I looked up at the wall surrounding the compound. Equally spaced 3-4 m apart on top of the entire wall were rather large vultures, each one staring at us with beady eyes, waiting for us to fall off our stools and become dinner. Fortunately, the experiment came to an end before that happened, and I lived on to eventually write this story. ✤

Notes

The author, **John H. Borden**, is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and a charter member of SFU's faculty. He retired from SFU's Department of Biological Sciences in 2003, a victim of the last year of mandatory retirement at age 65 in British Columbia. He immediately started a second career in the pest control products industry, and after working for three companies he started JHB Consulting, a sole proprietorship consultancy, in 2017. His principal client is BanfieldBio, Inc., a small R&D company run by SFU Master of Pest Management and MBA graduate Michael G. Banfield in Woodinville, WA. At the age of 87 his enduring motto is "*Work is a great retirement hobby*."

1 Alva A. App, PhD, retired from the UNDP in 1995, and moved to North Carolina, where 19 golf courses were within one hour's drive. He died in 2020.

2. Karun K. Nair, PhD, was a charter SFU faculty member, joining the Pestology Centre of the Department of Biological Sciences in 1965. He served as Chair of the department from 1981-1985 and retired in 1990. He died in 1994.

3. Thomas R. Odhiambo, PhD, founded the International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) in Kenya in 1970. With abundant funding from agencies and governments around the world, ICIPE was instantly empowered to conduct state-of-the-art science in Africa by Africans, contributing substantially to the emergence of African science from the bounds of colonialism. A true champion, he established the African Academy of Sciences in 1987 and was its Chair until 1999. He died in 2003.

4. Ahmed Hassanali, PhD, is an internationally recognized chemist and chemical ecologist. He retired as Deputy Director of ICIPE in 1997 and is currently a Professor in the School of Pure and Applied Sciences at Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya.

5. Keith N. Slessor, PhD, was a charter faculty member in SFU's Department of Chemistry. He was a brilliant teacher, enthralling countless students with the wonders of organic chemistry and earning the SFU Excellence in Teaching Award in 1995. In 2003, he was awarded the BC Science and Engineering Gold Medal in Natural Sciences, particularly for his discovery of the five-component honey bee queen mandibular pheromone. He retired from SFU in 2004 and died of cancer in 2012.

6. Peter T. Haskell, PhD, had a long career as an entomologist working on the biology and management of the desert locust. He retired in 1983 from his position as Director of the (UK) Centre for Overseas Pest Research and was immediately appointed as a Professor at the University of Wales, Cardiff. In 1975 he was made Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George by Her Majesty the Queen.

7. Tedeke Abate, PhD, is a stellar SFU graduate. He had a long career working on the development of varieties of maize and legumes suitable for African adoption. He was Director General of the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research from 2003 to 2007, and is currently Founder and Leader of Homegrown Vision, a non-profit, independent think tank focused on ensuring economic prosperity and food security in Ethiopia.

Companions I Have Known *(and some I wish I had never met)*

RON LONG

If you were to create a comic caricature of the Ugly American, you would have a perfect picture of this guy. He was absolutely convinced that if he spoke loud enough and repeated himself often enough the person, who spoke only Portuguese, would understand. And if they didn't, it was their fault. Throughout the trip he wore a blue camouflage-pattern outfit that made the rest of us feel embarrassed to be seen with him. He was far too arrogant to take advice from the guide about which foods were safe to eat in Brazil - and like the two guys below, he paid for it.

Similarly, on a trip to Guatemala two guys refused all advice about what to eat and I have never seen anyone so sick.

Refusing local advice on food in South America is exactly like Russian Roulette. You might get away with it, but you might not and the consequences are terrible. I never take a chance and I have never been sick in ten trips.

I wanted the best bird photography guide in Costa Rica, but he was already committed so he invited me to join his group of six and I agreed. That was a mistake. These people were constantly loud, consistently moved directly in front of my lens and couldn't even understand the concept when I asked them to stop doing that. They were not bad people - they were just from a different culture with different behavioural norms.

I organized a group of photographers to go to South Africa and that group included people that I did not know. Two guys made things difficult for everyone by constantly grabbing the best shooting position and blocking everyone else. When I suggested that maybe they could share the best photo opportunities, the answer was " No - I paid a lot for this trip and I'm going to get the best photographs." In his selfishness he completely ignored the fact that everyone, including me, had paid exactly the same amount. The very first rule of wildlife photography is: The photographer must never affect natural behaviour. In other words, total respect for wildlife is required. Not so with these two. They whistled and yelled at the animals in an attempt to get them to look at the camera.

On the other hand, a group of twelve friends and acquaintances that I organized for another trip to South Africa were great companions. Everyone cooperated and got along splendidly. I think that trip was a success because I personally chose and invited each of them.

In the same vein, travel with the right companions can be absolutely sublime - beyond enjoyable. My latest trip was to the UK to visit my nephew Dave, his wife Marianne and their daughter Lily, age fifteen.

Dave received his PhD from the University of Victoria and I visited them regularly while they lived on the Island. Dave graduated, took a faculty position at the University of Leicester and moved his family to the UK three years ago. I had not seen them for three years and how I missed them, especially Lily. But the missing worked both ways. They had been cut off from the extended family and friends that they had left behind and were eager to see us.

So finally my wife and I made the trip. My greatest fear while planning was that Lily, now a very active teen, would no longer be interested in uncle Ron. My worries were unfounded.

These three are among the most wonderful people on earth and they treated us like visiting royalty. Nothing was too good for us. Dave's intellectual conversations were far-ranging and always interesting and stimulating. Marianne is a kind and beautiful person and a great cook as well. And Lily, wonderful Lily, even though she was studying for exams she chose to spend as much time as possible with us. I had some intensely enjoyable discussions with Lily about the wide range of activities she is involved in and lost several arguments to her totally logical thinking.

When she was much younger Lily and I would engage in muffin decorating competitions. We always began with a double chocolate muffin and added icing and whipped cream and a variety of colourful sprinkles. Lily is very artistic, she always had a plan and she won hands down every time. I didn't mind because I had fun and got to eat my losing muffin. On this trip Lily was not too sophisticated to initiate another muffin contest.

For two and a half weeks we traveled the English Midlands and enjoyed the beautiful countryside and ancient villages together. For a Canadian it was a revelation to realize that any random cobblestone in a village street was older than anything in Canada.

Regardless of the activity, the mutual pleasure we all felt at just being together made this the most enjoyable trip I have done. The very best companions are those you truly love. ✤

Leslie Chong: Remembrance

JOHN H. BORDEN, JULIE E. BROOKS, JORGE E. MACIAS-SAMANO

We lost Leslie Jade Chong at the age of 75 when she died of a stroke on the night of 5 April. Leslie is survived by her sisters Glenda Walliser (Bill Cornish) and Jody Morin (Gordon), nephews and niece Daniel, Elijah, Chad, Cole and Richelle, and great nephews and niece, Ethan, Brooks, and Celeste. Predeceased by her parents Edith (née Woo) and Willie Chong.

Leslie Chong marched to a different drummer. When she graduated from Sir Charles Tupper Senior Secondary School in 1967, most of the bright young graduates went to UBC. So, of course Leslie enrolled at Simon Fraser University, an upstart institution that at the time was also marching to a different drummer. Leslie thrived as a Biological Sciences major, graduating in 1972.

Time to think of graduate school or a nice career in science. Not Leslie. Among other jobs she joined a carnival and became a truck-driving nomad throughout western Canada. However, Leslie soon tired of the nomadic life and in 1974 she found a temporary job as a technician working for Dr. Bryan Beirne, who had recently formed the pioneering Pestology Centre in the Department of Biological Sciences. John Borden first met Leslie shortly thereafter when she was driving around town doing the errands needed to set up a scientific meeting. This may be hard to believe for those who met Leslie later in her life, but she was wearing the requisite uniform of the day – a miniskirt! John had an urgent need for a technician to run his growing laboratory and immediately hired Leslie for a fulltime job. She was supported by grant money, so there was no promise that the job would last, but Leslie took a chance, and it lasted for 29 years until her retirement in November of 2003.

Leslie immediately took charge. From that time on, lab personnel departed on field trips with everything they needed. Cupboards and drawers were labeled and contained exactly what the sign said. If anyone left anything (from their lunch to an expensive chemical) in the lab refrigerator without a name and a date on it, they quickly learned that they could kiss it goodbye.

The lab was focused on trapping ambrosia beetles with newly discovered aggregation pheromones when Leslie joined the party. One of the tasks she faced was to coat wire mesh traps with a vile and flammable chemical composition called Stikem Special. It was unpleasant work. With characteristic inventiveness, Leslie developed the hot-dip coating method, wherein a steel drum was filled with Stikem, heated over a hot plate until the Stikem became molten, and the cylindrical traps were coated by dipping them into the fuming broth. Dangerous? Yes! But Leslie set it up outdoors. This apparatus was soon modified into a method for stripping traps of both the Stikem and the ambrosia beetles that they had captured. The steel drum contained even more flammable Shell Solvent. When the screen traps were immersed in the hot solvent, the beetles fell into a screen basket, which could be dumped into a tray, where they could easily be identified to species, sexed and counted. This replaced the laborious removal of beetles one by one from the sticky wire surface, a method that was sure to capture and imprison the long hippy hair of the day. This method lasted until PhD student Staffan Lindgren invented the multiple-funnel trap.

Leslie made other inventions. One time, after the lab had graduated to conducting research on bark beetles, Leslie was on a team laying in a future plot boundary through a lodgepole pine forest. The line was well marked with liberal amounts of pink flagging. Unbeknownst to Leslie or the other team members, Weyerhaeuser Canada used pink flagging to mark future road rights-of-way, and sure enough, later that day a company heavy equipment operator built a logging access road down the plot boundary. A fair amount of diplomacy was needed to resolve that dilemma. Because of this experience Leslie invented pink flagging that had repetitive printing of PEST MGMT, with two slashes separating each repetition. The flagging was made in Texas on order by a local forestry supply company, and was adopted as the standard method for marking Borden-lab field transects and blocks. Moreover, the invention was copied by others with their own message and printed flagging became universally used in BC forestry.

Here's another Leslie Chong invention. When it became necessary to evaluate the density of mountain pine beetle attacks by counting pitch tubes on pine bark, John Borden devised a method of doing so by cutting a 20 cm by 40 cm rectangle in a flexible sheet of plastic and then holding the plastic against the tree so that the pitch tubes could be counted in the exposed rectangle. The method worked but was met with characteristic disdain by Leslie. Her inventive alternative was two 20-cm-long pieces of thin dowelling. To count attack density Leslie held one stick vertically on the bark surface and used the other stick to scroll down its length, counting pitch tubes accurately as she went. The vertical stick was then lowered 20 cm, and the process was repeated. The sticks could easily be held in the pen pocket of a cruiser vest, and they eliminated the need to drag a piece of fragile plastic through the woods. If the sticks were lost, new sticks could be harvested from a shoot of aspen, alder or willow and cut to length using the ruler on the Silva compass that everyone carried.

No-one could ever call Leslie Chong a spendthrift. It is axiomatic that all research grants are too small. But under Leslie's watchful eye the money always lasted until the next grant came through. It could never be stated that Leslie was paid what she was worth, so she practiced the same diligence with her personal finances. While others bought cruiser vests, Leslie sewed her own. She even saved enough for investments. Did she buy stocks and bonds or perhaps a mortgage fund? Not Leslie. She bought "Leslie's Place", a five-acre plot of bare land on Hayes Creek east of Princeton. One summer, her presence was needed for continual monitoring of field experiments near her property. To save money and time spent driving back and forth from the lower mainland, Leslie and a postdoctoral fellow built a tent platform and dug a privy on back end of the property and lived on the land. That saved a ton of money. In their spare time they planted pine seedlings that form a dense forest today. However, there were occasional financial indiscretions. It soon became well known in the lab

that the gas station restaurant in Hedley served up a really fine pork chop dinner.

Leslie Chong was a tough-love but much appreciated mentor to almost 100 graduate students and approximately twice that number of undergraduate research assistants. With Leslie at the helm, you knew you were in safe hands when things went astray. Starting in SFU's trailer park laboratory cluster while awaiting more permanent digs, and ending in B6220, a large L-shaped lab shared with Dr. Mark Winston's apiculture students, Leslie set up her desk at the inside corner of the L, where her keen eye could monitor events in all directions. Always there to help, organized and to the point, Leslie touched the lives of not only students, but many members of the professional community throughout her career. She was particularly adept at welcoming international students and helping them integrate into the Canadian scientific culture. Fifty one years later, she could look back on her mentees in many countries in addition to Canada who had become professors, research scientists, senior professionals and administrators, as well as independent pest management consultants, every one of them grateful that she had been part of their lives. Lifelong friendships developed, with many keeping in personal contact with her for reunion lunches or parties, not to mention Christmas cards, marriage invitations, birth notices, and even funerals.

In addition to her inventions and her mentoring Leslie Chong contributed substantively to many research projects, with 26 co-authored papers in peer-reviewed journals. Her contributions to the knowledge of the chemical ecology of ambrosia and bark beetles and their application in pest management are particularly noteworthy.

Although strong of character, Leslie was short in stature. While others motored through the woods, Leslie would often fall behind, disappearing behind a large log or becoming entangled in a stand of Sitka alder. If the transect ran through a patch of Devil's Club, Leslie would have a face-to-face encounter with it. After days like that not much would be said on the drive back to town. That didn't stop her from using her quick wit to make fun of her "superiors." One day the research team split up into pairs to evaluate a large-scale mountain pine beetle experiment. John Borden was paired with a young lady who was a nationally carded 10,000-m runner. All day long, John labored to keep up, and at the end, he and his partner were the last pair out of the woods. When they joined the others waiting at the trucks, John complained that he felt as if he had been trying to keep up with an all-terrain vehicle all day. Leslie took this in and immediately responded "Yeah, in a 1957 Chrysler!"

That was the Leslie Chong whom we all knew and loved. She will be sorely missed. ✤

Getting Involved in Community Theatre

CHRISTINE MANZER

What is outside of your comfort zone? My list was long, but I have used the eight years since my retirement from the SFU Library to challenge that discomfort.

It started with buying theatre tickets. That's easy you say. Well, yes, especially for community theatre where the ticket prices are certainly reasonable.

Next came my registration in a few play-reading courses at the SFU Harbour Centre campus. SFU's Liberal Arts and 55+ Program offer non-credit courses to older adult learners. Some are now on Zoom. Covid-19 moved the courses solely to the Zoom format. Happily, they are back in person as well as online if that works best for the instructor.

With that play reading experience and what I learned about analyzing a play, I took the bold step of volunteering for a local community theatre's play reading committee. In preparation for the 2024 – 2025 season the committee read and discussed a total of 19 plays. The season only needs four. We considered Canadian playwrights, some new and others well known. Local directors were welcomed to make a pitch to the committee to have the company produce their work.

Balancing a community theatre season means you consider how many opportunities the script offers. All performers are volunteers, so a script with four or more characters works nicely to give many a chance to be on stage. If a play requiring all female actors is considered, it is fair to also consider one that provides opportunities for male actors. If one production requires hours and hours of set building and painting, perhaps the next one should have minimal set building requirements. Not overworking the volunteer construction team and technical people is a good idea.

Having a diverse committee is helpful. One member may encourage particular groups, ensuring that, if called for in the script, when audition requests go out to members of a minority group, many will apply. The actors are out there. Give them a chance.

Much has been said about the "greying" of the theatre audience. This is often only the case at the matinees. But it does not have to be the case. Companies are grateful for all audience members and all ages who fill the seats.

My newest experience is called Reading Theatre where a group gathers in New Westminster to read a play together. Nothing further comes from this, just the fun and experience of reading through a script every two weeks. This is the closest I have come to using timing and projection to give life to a character. Yes, another stretch of my comfort zone.

What have you seen lately? It hardly matters where you live in the Lower Mainland or throughout BC. There is a local theatre company waiting to welcome you. ✤

PHOTO: SAMSON TARIMO / UNSPLASH

Bus Stories

SHEILA DELANY

I lived in Vancouver for a half century before ever taking a bus in the city. I always had a car, whether my white Volvo station wagon (so useful in roadying for my punk rocker sons and their bands) or a blue Toyota Tercel—two of the blue Tercels, in fact. The second one was decommissioned by an accident about three years ago and ICBC deemed it too old to repair. (As it was 25 or 26, and my mechanic, who drove the same car, assured me it was good for another five.) That was when I decided to give up driving and discovered Vancouver's transit system. As a graduate of New York's subways, I enjoyed the cleanliness and quiet of Vancouver's trains, which one New York visitor described as "nearly a meditative experience". On the other hand: lots of long stairways, too much cost for the convenient passcard, and a bus transfer couldn't get you onto the train, i.e., insufficient integration. Discovering bus routes, I found that the # 8 at my corner terminates at Harbour Centre, where I often use the library; the Main Street bus is a short walk in the other direction; a major east-west artery is two blocks north and another a few blocks south. So I opted for the bus. Now, full confession, I usually take a taxi.

The main discovery was other riders. Often one of my neighbours would be going or coming home on the same bus that I was on, and it was nice to have a conversation. But many passengers were those whom I-- an academic with a car--didn't see up close, unless maybe they wiped my windshield or asked for money outright. It was another side of Vancouver, another population: the city's sick and lame, stooped old ladies with crammed shopping carts, people in wheelchairs, people nodding out from heroin, the half-clad or muttering or shouting crazies. I was impressed with how patient, how kind and understanding the drivers are, letting the entry and exit ramps up or down, calling out instructions to lock or to hold on--though I had had busdriver friends and should have known. Of course ridership depends on the route: mine to Harbour Centre starts out in an ordinary working-class, student and immigrant neighborhood, then passes down part of Main Street and then the DownTown EastSide. One day a fat man got on near downtown wearing nothing but a pair of shorts; obviously disturbed, he sat across from me, screamed and growled intermittently, then got off a few blocks later. I asked the driver whether it's permitted to refuse entry to an undressed person: No.

The intricate ballet of seating in a crowded bus was another lesson. Not everyone observes the prominently displayed reminders about the front seats being reserved for disabled, wheelchairs and strollers, and seniors. Some people will rise for an elderly person on spotting him or her; others, usually young, will steadfastly gaze at their phone until asked to give up their seat. Some older people would rather stand, even with bags, than ask, although looking daggers at the oblivious young persons seated in front of them.

Once a good looking white-haired man rose to offer me his seat. "But you're a senior, too", I said. "But I'm a man!" was his proud reply. Another time sitting next to a woman on a long ride, we began by comparing notes on seating, then got into

PHOTO: LINDSAY WILLIAM-ROSS | THE FIRST ELECTRIC TROLLEY BUSES ROLLED ONTO VANCOUVER'S STREETS ON AUG. 16, 1948.

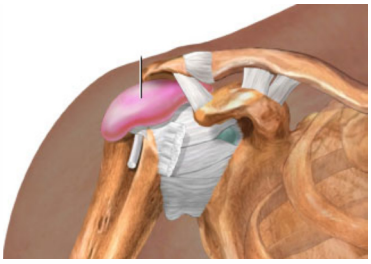
other things. She turned out to be a writer and lover of theatre, so I invited her into a book group. Unfortunately, our choice at that time was a novel that disturbed her so deeply that she felt personally attacked by the author (Haruki Murakami) and reneged on the meeting. Another time when I reached up to pull the stop-signal cord, the elderly man across the aisle congratulated me on being able to make the reach; we laughed in complicity. And there was the beautiful young girl seated perpendicular to me who couldn't stop weeping. I offered my Kleenex pack, and told her about a crying jag I'd had decades ago. She gratefully took the Kleenex; then another woman across from us chimed in to offer comfort and a similar experience. The girl told us she was thirteen and something had happened at school. She stopped weeping, more or less, but then she had to get off the bus, midway up Fraser, so we never found out what had happened, or at which school.

My most memorable bus story is an SFU story, and I wasn't on the bus. I was teaching an evening class ("Prison writing": we started with Boethius and ended with Mumia Abu Jamal) down at Harbour Centre. Perhaps because of the personal and revelatory nature of the texts, the class developed an unusual esprit de corps and willingness to reveal themselves. One of the students was a very quiet, smart and conscientious young Chinese man. One evening he was absent—he had never been absent or even late before but was always already in place when I and the others arrived. Eventually he came in looking distraught, and the others wanted to know what had happened. Hesitantly he told us: he always rode the bus down Hastings. This time, when it neared downtown, there was a sharp, repeated banging at the front door when the bus stopped at a red light. The driver opened and a naked woman got on, obviously frightened. She said she was running from someone who had taken her clothes and threatened her, could the driver let her off at the police station? He gave her his jacket and let her off as close as possible to the police station. "That was the first time," my student said, barely able to get the words out, "that I ever saw a naked woman."

You will all have to gloss this powerful moment, in its many dimensions, for yourselves. ✤

Bursa, Bursitis and Ageing

PARVEEN BAWA



A bursa is a small, fluid-filled sac that cushions and reduces friction between bones, tendons and muscles. Each of us have more than 150 bursae (bursa singular), which act as shock absorbers and make movements smooth by reducing friction between various tissues. When bursae become inflamed, it hurts.

Structure of bursa

There are different types of bursae, the most common type is synovial bursa that we will be dealing with in the article. In humans, synovial bursae are generally located near the large joints of arms and legs. The outer wall, made of connective tissue, provides structure to a synovial bursa. The inner surface of this wall is lined by synovial lining that is made of synoviocytes, cells that produce the lubricant synovial fluid. Synovial fluid, clear or slightly yellow, reduces friction and allows smoother movements between bones, tendons, muscles and skin. Bursae come in different sizes. An average bursa is approximately 2 mm thick and 4 cm in diameter. The iliopsoas bursa, located in the hip region, is the largest in the body with an average size of 6 cm x 3 cm.

Bursitis

Bursitis is an inflammation of the bursae. When a bursa is irritated, the synovial membrane secretes synovial fluid leading to swelling of the bursa. When pressure is applied to a swollen bursa, it hurts. Bursitis can be acute or chronic.

In acute bursitis, patients generally complain of pain on palpation of the inflamed bursa. The range of motion of the involved joint may be decreased secondary to pain. Active motion involving the affected bursa also elicits pain.

Chronic bursitis is often painless. The bursa itself has had time to expand to accommodate the increased fluid and the result is significant swelling and thickening of the bursa. An examination of the skin is very important in the evaluation of acute or chronic bursitis. The skin should be evaluated for trauma, erythema, and warmth. One study found a temperature increase of 2.2 °C of the skin overlying the affected bursa compared to that overlying the unaffected contralateral bursa during septic bursitis. However, deep bursitis, even when acute, may produce no tenderness with palpation of the overlying structures or any obvious skin changes.

Symptoms of bursitis: When synovial bursa is inflamed, the bursa enlarges with fluid, and any movement against or direct pressure upon the bursa will produce pain. There is pain or stiffness at the site of bursa, it hurts more when you press on it; the site of inflammation looks red and swollen. If not taken care of, symptoms can get more severe.

Evaluation: A physician can generally evaluate bursitis; imaging is very helpful in the diagnosis and management of bursitis. Both ultrasound and MRI are used to differentiate different types of clinical problems.

Causes of bursitis: Repetitive movements are the worst things for people who tend to get bursitis. Other causes include joint trauma, rheumatoid and osteoarthritis, gout and infection. Excessive leaning on the knees can inflame bursae around the knee; excessive leaning on elbows (like students do) can inflame the bursa at the elbow; excessive use of stairs as the main mode of exercise can cause inflammation of bursae of the knees. Here are some typical names of bursitis at various locations: prepatellar (in front of the knee cap) bursitis is also known as "housemaid's knee"; olecranon (back of the elbow) bursitis is sometimes referred to as "student's elbow"; infrapatellar (located beneath the kneecap) bursitis is often called "clergyman's knee"; while ischial (bony part of pelvic you sit on) bursitis is called "weaver's bottom" or "tailor's bottom".

When an injury causes someone to move their joint differently than normal, it can irritate a bursa. For example, if you have a foot injury and you limp a little, the forces between bones and muscles or tendons are modified in both limbs, which can inflame some irritated bursae.

> *"As we age, the bursae in the body can undergo several changes."*

Ageing on Bursae: As we age, the bursae in the body can undergo several changes. There is degeneration of the bursae, that is, bursal lining can become thinner and less resilient; synovial fluid inside the bursae may decrease or become less viscous, thus reducing its ability to cushion joints effectively. This can lead to more friction, making movement less smooth and more painful. Ageing can also result in calcium deposits on the bursae which can cause pain, stiffness and limited mobility.

Besides degeneration of bursa itself, there are other age-related changes that affect bursal function. Chronic inflammation in all tissues of seniors leads to chronic inflammation of the bursae that can cause swelling and pain. Any injury or inflammation in the bursae takes longer to heal in older adults due to slower tissue repair and reduced blood flow.

In general, ageing changes properties of muscles, bones and ligaments resulting in alterations in our movement patterns; such alterations modify shearing forces on the bursae leading to chronic irritation.

Treatment

Many pathologic processes may be confused for bursitis; joint pain is caused by many different disorders, and therefore bursitis can mimic osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, or other inflammatory conditions. It is important to know the source(s) of pain in your joint before you seek treatment. For most situations, the treatment might be the same.

For a small amount of acute inflammation, you can usually take care of bursitis yourself. Rest the affected joint. An ice

pack will reduce swelling, and so will compression. Ice works on fresh inflammation but for chronic situations it might not help. To reduce pain and inflammation, take a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) such as ibuprofen or aspirin. It usually takes a week or so for bursitis to go away.

If the symptoms persist, that is, you have a fever; there is excessive swelling, redness, bruising or a rash in the affected area; pain is sharp, shooting or disabling; you have a medical condition or you take drugs that may increase your risk of an infection, go to your doctor. For excessive pain and inflammation, your doctor might prescribe specific exercises, or even cortisone injections. Exercise the muscles in the joints that tend to get bursitis. You can protect these joints by strengthening the muscles around them. Of course, don't exercise until all bursitis symptoms are gone, which is tricky for older adults. For those prone to bursitis, it might mean weeks of rest before one can do exercise again. Use your own judgement. As far as cortisone is concerned, an occasional injection is helpful in reducing the pain. But frequent use of cortisone is harmful to the surrounding tissues.

Your health care provider might suggest ultrasound treatment for bursitis. The guidelines for the use of ultrasound vary from country to country; and the treatment seems to be of limited use. If all treatments fail, surgery for serious bursitis may become the last resort.

In conclusion, bursitis is more likely to occur the older you get. Try to stay as active and flexible as possible. ✤

SFURA volunteers at Pancake Breakfast for students
Febraury 16

Group: Sheilagh, Alana, Enrique (retirees) Nancy Mah, organizer of Pancake Breakfast.

Yolanda (retiree)

DINNER AT THE DAC

SFU retirees and their guests are invited to dinner at the Diamond Alumni Centre, **Wednesday, June 25 at 5:30 pm**.

We have booked the entire restaurant, so please contact your former SFU colleagues and invite them to join you for a dinner reunion!

Dinner Price (subsidized by SFURA)
SFURA members: $25
Guests of SFURA members: $40
We are grateful to SFU Advancement for their contribution of $1000 towards the cost of this event.

Optional Tour of the SFU Museum of Anthropology at 4:30 pm
A private tour of SFU's Museum of Anthropology is available; you can reserve for the tour when you sign up for dinner.

RSVP
Please purchase your tickets by **June 16**
https://SFURA2025dinner.eventbrite.ca

CONTACT US
Email retirees@sfu.ca
Web www.sfu.ca/retirees

A Criminologist's Point of View

THE IMMORALITY OF USING VOLUNTEERS TO EXECUTE FELLOW HUMANS SENTENCED TO DEATH / BY EZZAT A. Fattah

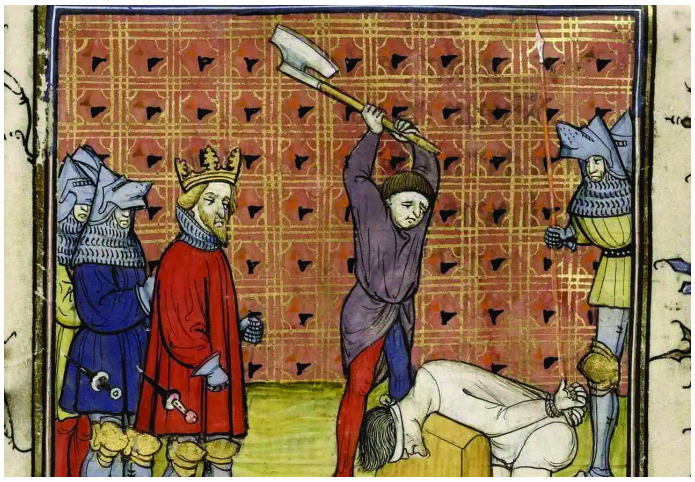


ILLUSTRATION: THE KING OF NAVARRE (CHARLES II THE BAD) HAVING THE LEADERS OF THE JACQUERIE EXECUTED BY BEHEADING./ (BRITISH LIBRARY)

Introduction

While the USA is considered by many to be the most advanced country in the world, it is hard to deny that it still has some negative and regressive traditions that have long disappeared from European countries as well as several other countries in the Western World, including Canada.

One of those traditions that have resisted abolition for centuries is the death penalty which has been abolished in less than half of the states - 23 - but remains active (or on the books) in the remaining 27. (Death Penalty Information Centre) Yes, despite appeals from prestigious organizations such as the United Nations and Amnesty International, to mention but two, the USA has adamantly and persistently refused to do away with the barbaric practice of legalized murder! The fact that such a progressive society continues to use this brutalizing, dehumanizing, Talion Law punishment surely defies logic and rationality

The Incomprehensible Death Penalty Situation in the USA

According to *Wikipedia*, twenty-five people, all male, were executed in the United States in 2024, three by nitrogen hypoxia and twenty-two by lethal injection. Another 26 were sentenced to death the same year. The vindictive, retaliatory and vengeful nature of such legalized murders is usually rationalized by some unique deterrent effect this arbitrary and discriminatory penalty is supposed to have. In reality, such advocacy is nothing but a futile attempt to camouflage the vindictiveness of this archaic vengeance into some utilitarian function.

Be this as it may, the supposedly unique deterrent effect of capital punishment is almost universally disproven and it is quite a challenge to find a single study or a piece of neutrally scrutinized empirical research that confirms the existence of such an illusory effect (*See Fattah, 1972; 1983; 2023*).

As much as I have tried to understand this peculiar situation, I have failed to find a rational explanation for the United States continued adherence to such a primitive punishment. What really surprised me is the persistent refusal of the ever declining number of death penalty supporters in our neighbour to the South, to acknowledge and accept the fact that capital punishment is a relic from the past, a relic that is not concordant with any of the contemporary aims of sentencing. They adamantly refuse to admit that it is the last remnant of an archaic, primitive justice system. Such reluctance persists despite criminologists and lay persons insistence that legalized murder is a vestige of a bygone era, an era when punishment, either for lack of humanity or alternatives or both, was physical, violent, cruel and irreversible.

The Immorality of the Execution of Brad Sigmon in South Carolina on Friday March 7, 2025

On Friday March 7, 2025, the media (Greenville News) reported that a South Carolina man, 67 years old, convicted of murder, was executed by firing squad, the first U.S. prisoner to die by that method in 15 years.

What I found rather shocking in this news item is that the SC authorities used three volunteer prison employees to carry out the execution. According to *Greenville News*, Sigmon killed his ex-girlfriend's parents with a baseball bat in their Greenville County home in 2001 (he spent more than two decades on Death Row) in a botched plot to kidnap their daughter. He told police he planned to take her for a romantic weekend, then kill her and himself.

Greenville News reported that Sigmon's lawyers said he chose the firing squad because the electric chair would "cook him alive," and he feared that a lethal injection of pentobarbital into his veins would send a rush of fluid and blood into his lungs and drown him.

The firing squad is by no means a novel execution method. Actually, it has a long and violent history in the U.S. and around the world. Death in a hail of bullets has been used to punish mutinies and desertion in armies, as frontier justice in America's Old West and as a tool of terror and political repression in the former Soviet Union and Nazi Germany (*Greenville News*).

Greenville News further reported that since 1977 only three other prisoners in the U.S. have been executed by firing squad. All were in Utah, most recently Ronnie Lee Gardner in 2010. Another Utah man, Ralph Menzies, could be next; he is awaiting the result of a hearing in which his lawyers argued that his dementia makes him unfit for execution.

In South Carolina on March 7, 2025, a group of protesters holding signs with messages such as "All life is precious" and "Execute justice not people" gathered outside the prison before Sigmon's execution.

Appeals were made to Republican Governor Henry McMaster to commute the death sentence to life in prison, arguing that Sigmon was a model prisoner trusted by guards and worked every day to atone for the killings. They also maintained that he committed the killings while experiencing severe mental illness. McMaster denied the clemency plea. It seems that for whatever reason, political, religious or otherwise, no South Carolina governor has ever commuted a death sentence in that state, where 46 other prisoners have been executed since the death penalty resumed in some U.S. states in 1976. Seven of those died in the electric chair and 39 others by lethal injection.

The Abominable Death penalty Situation in South Carolina

In the early 2000s, South Carolina was among the busiest death penalty states, carrying out an average of three executions a year. But officials suspended executions for 13 years, in part because they were unable to obtain lethal injection drugs! The state Supreme Court cleared the way to resume them in July 2024. Freddie Owens was the first to be put to death, on Sept. 20, after McMaster denied him clemency. Richard Moore was executed on Nov. 1 and Marion Bowman Jr. on Jan. 31. According to the media, going forward the court will allow an execution every five weeks.

South Carolina now has 28 inmates on its death row including two who have exhausted their appeals and are awaiting execution, most likely this spring. Before executions were paused, more than 60 people faced death sentences. Many of those have either had their sentences reduced to life or died in prison.

The Immorality of the Death penalty

The immorality of the death penalty itself has been the subject of hundreds of books and thousands of articles so it would be rather superfluous to try to dwell on the topic in the limited space available here.

The morality of letting convicted felons sit for several decades (in Sigmon's case over 2 decades) on death row waiting for the final decision to live or to die is much too repugnant to need any further elaboration

More recently, the Death Penalty debates have shifted from the lengthy death row waiting periods to the morality of various methods of execution. How the convicted person is to be killed has become a subject of long discussions and heated debates. Surprisingly, many of the debaters, rather than condemning the immorality of capital punishment go at great length discussing which of the current methods of killing the guilty person is less cruel or more humane, giving the impression that it is possible to do the deliberate cold blooded killing of a human being in a "humane" way.

> *"Using volunteers to do the killing surpasses the lowest point that the American Correctional System has reached."*

The recent execution carried out on March 7, 2025 does push the brutality and immorality of legalized murder to an unprecedented level. Using volunteers to do the killing surpasses the lowest point that the American Correctional System has reached.

The media reports I saw did not indicate or specify whether those volunteers were paid for doing the killing and if so how much. But to engage volunteers, paid or unpaid, to shoot to death a fellow human being strikes me as the ultimate in depravity and immorality.

Trying to recover from the shock this piece of news brought to me I went to the comments that followed the report(s) on Yahoo News, searching for someone who is critical, not just of the death penalty, but of the use of volunteers to perform society's dirty tasks. Alas 99% of the commentators were busy affirming that the executed killer only got what he deserved and it is an appropriate, just dessert for what he did to his victims. Disillusioned and disheartened, I wondered about humanity? Where is humanity heading when the most powerful, most technologically advanced and the richest society on earth has not yet adopted a more civilized and more humane alternative to the abhorrent practice of legalized murder? ✤

Notes

FREE WPXI News app

Greenville News

Wikipedia

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Photos / Ron Long

The Eternal Search for a Non-Discriminatory Criminal Justice System

IS RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IMMUNE TO DISCRIMINATION? / BY EZZAT A. FATTAH

In the daily news, dominated as it is by war, conflicts of every type, natural disasters, and national and international politics, a small, recent item from a faraway country (Dec. 3rd, 2024) caught my attention. It made me feel quite uneasy about a non-punitive system of justice I have been preaching about and strongly promoting for several decades now, namely Restorative Justice.

The news item comes from Vietnam. It is about a white collar crime case that has received wide publicity all over the globe. Not only because of the amount of funds involved but also because the defendant, a female, was sentenced to death, a rare occurrence in most parts of the world.

Here is the news item which probably has gone unnoticed by many criminologists and legal scholars at SFU and elsewhere.

> *On Thursday April 11, 2024, a court in Vietnam sentenced real estate tycoon Truong My Lan to death over her role in a 304 trillion dong ($12.5 billion) financial fraud case, the country's biggest on record, state media reported.*
>
> *Her trial, which began on March 5 and ended earlier than planned, was one dramatic result of a campaign against corruption, which the leader of the country's ruling Communist Party, Nguyen Phu Trong, has pledged for years to stamp out.*
>
> *Lan, the chairwoman of real estate developer Van Thinh Phat Holdings Group, was found guilty of embezzlement, bribery and violations of banking rules at the end of the trial in the business hub of Ho Chi Minh City, state media said.*

Not surprisingly, the property magnate Truong My Lan, 68, appealed the death sentence she received on April 11 for her involvement in this massive fraud case. Her appeal was **unsuccessful.** Surprisingly, however, it turned out, to the astonishment of many including me, that she could still have her death sentence commuted to life imprisonment if she agreed to pay nine billion dollars!! She managed to pay it.

YES! The Vietnamese court's decision handed out on Tuesday, December 3, 2024, stipulates that she can avoid execution by repaying 75 per cent of the stolen funds: roughly $9 billion. Why only 75% rather than 100% is not clear to me and is not explained in the news!

This case, unconventional in many respects, raises a number of important ethical, legal and criminological questions that cry out for answers. There are also basic fundamental lessons that can and need to be learnt from just this single case, a case that challenges the fairness and equality of punitive criminal justice while casting doubt on the presumed non-discriminatory nature of Restorative Justice.

Yes, apparent indiscrimination is a central positive feature that avid proponents of Restorative Justice, like me, have always used in order to gain support for this alternative and promising justice paradigm.

Let me now bother you, if I may, with some personal comments on this atypical case and try to explain the anxiety I felt reading about it.

One aspect of the case that I will skip from my discussion is the appropriateness of using the death penalty for white collar crime. While such use may be applauded in some quarters for highlighting the extreme seriousness of this type of crime, it will never get any approval from a deadly opponent of capital punishment like me. See my most recent book: "*Legalized Murder: My Lifelong Crusade Against the Death Penalty" (2023)*.

For centuries, the criminal justice system, even in the most democratic societies on earth, has been known and criticized for its discriminatory nature and its unfair and unequal practices that mostly affect the powerless, the minorities, the poor, the have- nots, and the outcasts.

Tonnes of empirical research and millions of pages attest to this flagrant and not too hidden discrimination. No wonder that discrimination has been and remains one of the strongest and most valid arguments against the death penalty. I personally used it quite often in my lifelong crusade and it was handy during my *Amnesty International* mission to the USA in 1985 pleading for its abolition.

Over the years, not only did I use the discrimination argument to plead against capital punishment, but I also used it quite frequently to preach against imprisonment. I never had difficulty showing, with evidence at hand, that the punitive and popular goal of "making the punishment fit the crime" is just a mirage that can never be justly and fairly implemented in punitive judicial practice.

> *"As to monetary penalties, their flagrant discriminatory nature is far too obvious to need any elaboration!"*

As to monetary penalties, their flagrant discriminatory nature is far too obvious to need any elaboration!

In fact, the inherent discriminatory nature of the various punitive sanctions prescribed in our criminal law was repeatedly highlighted not only in my earlier books and articles dating back half a century, but also in my more recent books as well. See for example:

Restorative Justice: Society's Steady March Towards A Civilized Justice System" (2019); "For the Love of humanity:A Criminologist's Testament" (2023); "Criminology Today: A Critical Assessment" (2020).

All in all, it seemed quite obvious to me, and hopefully to others, that the empirically documented and undisputed discriminatory nature of the punishment paradigm as well as the practices of the punitive/retributive criminal justice system point to an urgent and pressing need to have them replaced with a less discriminatory and a more equal and fairer criminal justice system. This is precisely one of the main reasons for my favouring an alternative justice system and one of the main arguments I always use for promoting restorative justice.

Having stated how I feel and having explained my position, it is easy to understand how I felt when I learned for the first time how the Vietnamese law tarnishes the concept and practice of Restorative Justice by legalizing discrimination and making it possible to have a death sentence commuted upon paying a certain amount of money. In the case cited, an extremely high amount. This is an option that is obviously not available to poor defendants on death row. Hence, the question in the title of this article: *Is Restorative Justice Immune To Discrimination?*

So, what should we make of this admittedly unconventional case?

Should it be praised for publicizing that white collar crimes can be as serious as or even more serious than the most violent of crimes and thus deserve and should receive the ultimate penalty?

Should we hail it as a case revealing to criminologists like me and others an obscure loophole in the Vietnamese criminal law that tacitly admits that Restorative Justice can be (or is) superior to punitive justice in some cases?

Are there lessons to be learnt from this particular case? Does it show a discriminatory side to Restorative justice that allows a defendant to escape the death penalty if she/he can manage to pay back billions of dollars?

One aspect it definitely shows is the concrete danger of having two different justice systems (RJ & PJ) simultaneously in existence. Such a dual system carries with it an extremely high potential for discrimination by allowing the rich to escape punishment by simply paying a sum of money to their victims. And if this is allowed, what would be the difference between Restorative Justice and current monetary penalties that allow the wealthy to escape the deprivation of liberty by simply paying their fines? ✤

Critical comments as well as answers to the title question would be gratefully welcome and deeply appreciated!

The Corsi-Rosenthal Box

DAVID HUNTLEY

Fire season is here. We may well again have to suffer days of smoke-filled air. This is not good for anyone's health. To this end I decided to acquire a Corsi-Rosenthal box, a fancy name for an air filter designed by a pair of engineers. As the picture shows it is basically a 54x54x60 cm cube; the four sides are Merv 13 furnace air filters; the top is a 51 cm box fan, and the bottom is cardboard from the box-fan container. It is assembled using duct tape. The fan is oriented to suck air from the interior and blow it upwards, thus air flows from outside, into the box through the filters.

One can purchase the parts at hardware stores, or you can, as I did, buy a kit and assemble it. I bought mine from EBSECan, Evidence-Based Social Enterprises Canada (EBSECan) *Charity Fundraising Store.*

It is not quiet. I know people who like such noises to help them sleep. I may do that, or run it in a different room. On the web I notice that some people replace the box fan with several computer fans which are much quieter. These are now also sold by EBSECan. ✤

SFURA Luncheon
February 6, 2025
at Steamworks.

Once Known as the City Nights

JILL MANDRAKE

I imagine some of you, along with me, fondly remember the City Nights, a repertory cinema / theatre in the 1970s showing double and triple bills that can only be described as unparalleled. I remember seeing *Fantastic Planet*, the animated art film by Rene Laloux; *The Harder They Come*, featuring Jimmy Cliff; and George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, all on the same playbill.

The City Nights was located at 150 Hastings East, when the neighbourhood had a certain vibrancy which is almost impossible to imagine now. The theatre's several opera boxes were condemned as unsafe at the time, but the two balconies and main floor were often jam-packed. One of the managers was the late Laurine Harrison, who went on to coordinate Cinema Simon Fraser, and then eventually became SFU's Ombudsperson.

From the first time I bought a ticket to the City Nights, I was dazzled by the sheer ornateness of its interior, and at one point decided to look into its history:

Originally, the building was Vancouver's first Pantages theatre, built in 1907 by Alexander Pantages, the west coast theatre magnate who made his money in the gold rush. By 1917 Alexander Pantages built a new and even more lavish theatre at 28 Hastings West, across from where the Army & Navy department store was. Alexander's brother George managed the new Pantages, which was later called the Beacon.

When this second Pantages was built, the original stood vacant for two years. In 1919 it was saved by a new manager, Harry C. Lewis, who lived next door in the Regent Hotel, which still exists. Lewis renamed his theatre the Royal, featuring vaudeville and other live entertainment, together with films.

By the 1930s, the Royal was managed by Walter P. Nichols, who continued to deliver live entertainment until the late 1940s. It sounds as though Nichols had an especially tumultuous time. An excerpt from *Vancouver Exposed: Searching For the City's Hidden History*, by Eve Lazarus, reads:

On March 20, 1933 the Royal Theatre was torn apart by a bomb, its lobby and ticket office destroyed. W.P. Nichols, who lived in a suite above the theatre, was jolted from his bed. Despite the bad blood between theatre employees, police decided it was not a result of labour unrest, but simply a personal grudge.

The "bad blood" refers to an ongoing battle between the BC Projectionists' Society (of which Nichols was a member), and "a breakaway group of non-union employees."

Curiously, that suite above the theatre still existed in the 1970s, when Laurine was the manager, as I remember her telling me she'd often crash there after working long hours.

In the late 1940s, an investment company, Singer & Aceman, took over and changed the name of the Royal to the State. By the mid-1950s the building was taken over by CCA Theatres, Ltd., and the name was changed to the Avon. You might recall the Avon's neon sign precariously perched above the marquee, as it still remained in City Nights days; probably too costly to remove it. The last of the live circuits played the Avon in the 1950s; by the end of that decade, business dwindled considerably.

In the early 70s, as mentioned, the next incarnation was the City Nights, and when it closed its doors a few years later, lots of devotees felt downright grievous. Fortunately, there still existed a number of repertory theatres, such as the Ridge and the Hollywood, but there was no other interior as arrestingly beautiful as the City Nights.

The building was vacant only a short while, and re-opened as the Sun Sing, showing Asian films. There weren't any sub-titles but I'd watch films there occasionally, for the novelty of sitting at the top of the second balcony. I recall seeing very few other customers at the time.

The Sun Sing closed down by the early 1990s, and the building remained vacant and decaying until its demise. Although the Pantages was registered as a heritage building, and major attempts were made to save it, in 2011 the roof collapsed and it had to be demolished.

Here is a positive postscript: In early 2007 an organization — possibly Heritage Vancouver but I cannot remember — set up a tour of the Pantages interior. Unfortunately, I was working that day and unable to attend, but local photographer Randall Epp shot several photos, including the opera boxes and the otherworldly passage to the backstage. I'm pleased to share these exclusive photos with our readership. ✤

Socialist Report

The Pleasures of Public Transport

TOM O'SHEA

Today's column is a little different. Some of my recent experiences on the bus and SkyTrain have led me to think about the social aspects of travel on public transport in Vancouver. But first let me praise the system itself.

With a compass card and the senior discount, you can travel by bus anywhere in Metro Vancouver for $2.15. Such a deal. And travel by SkyTrain after 6:30 pm and on weekends and holidays is the same. Compare that with London. When I was on a research semester living in London I travelled from King's Cross to Manor House (only five stations). The cost for that trip now would be about $6.00. No discount for seniors. And the Vancouver fare is good for 90 minutes...enough time to go for a quick shop and return. The Transit app on my iPhone uses GPS to show my location and nearby bus lines. If I choose one line I can see the little bus icons moving along in real time. So, I can plan my trip in advance or know how long I have to wait.

Recently, a New York transplant to Vancouver said she was astounded to hear people getting off the bus calling out "Thank you, driver." She also noted how even the signs on Vancouver buses are polite: "Sorry, out of service." When Leora and I travel often people offer to get up from the seats nominally reserved for the elderly and infirm. Even though my self-image does not fit either of those two categories I accept with thanks and get rewarded with smiles. Sometimes I respond by saying that I have only one or two stations to go. On getting off I thank them for their offer. Such small social interactions mean a lot.

Recently we returned home on the SkyTrain after a VSO concert at the Orpheum. Another couple was carrying a VSO program. This led to an animated conversation about the program we had just seen and the prospects for next year's season. On another occasion I was running to catch a bus in Chinatown and just missed it, as had another person. She, in a loud creaky voice, voiced her disappointment. During our subsequent 10-minute wait she told me all about her life on disability, how she managed her welfare cheques, and looked after her aging mother.

I got a new insight into people living a life so different from mine. Leora is learning to speak Spanish and always takes the opportunity to engage in Spanish conversations with people on the bus or SkyTrain. Recently, she talked to a Spanish speaker who wanted to improve her English, so now she and Andrea meet regularly over coffee to their mutual benefit.

But not all transit travel is roses. Recently I noted a young passenger who seemed in distress, walking nervously up and down the bus. He suddenly and violently threw up on the floor, fortunately two rows away from me. The driver politely asked everyone to alight and wait for the next bus.

I use the SkyTrain to cheat on the hills. On June 1st I will be hosting 18 SFU retirees at the Vancouver Canadians baseball game at Nat Bailey stadium. Rather than force my pushbike up the hill from False Creek to Queen Elizabeth Park, I load it on the SkyTrain and get off at 25th. The ride back is a breeze. Leora and I love to take our bikes on SkyTrain to Aberdeen station in Richmond. Two blocks from there we connect to the West Dyke Trail and ride to Steveston and back through Richmond along Railway Avenue, a route similar to the Arbutus Greenway in Vancouver.

Finally, the SeaBus to North Vancouver is a great way to see Vancouver from the water. Our visitors always love it, as well as Lonsdale Quay, Shipbuilders' Square, and the Polygon Art Gallery with their specialty photographic exhibits.

Now I can hardly wait for the Gondola to SFU.

PAINTING : MARILYN BOWMAN / ACRYLIC

PHOTO: RON LONG

A Poem Can Look Ahead or Back

BY JARED CURTIS

A poem can look ahead or back, and rail
Against the silent gods who only stuff their ears.
Grieving ones may pull their hair and flail

At enemies who pelt the heart with hail
And leave the soul a reservoir of tears.
An angry poem will swell to rail

At those who aim to hammer in a nail
That shuts off justice, rights, and steers
Us back to times where no one wants to sail.

Other poets tell a different tale—
Among them is the choir of sonneteers
Singing songs that do their loves unveil.

But listen for the quiet music words avail
To soothe the anxious mind and tame heart's fears.
A poem that looks ahead with hope won't fail
To find an ear to please throughout the years..

© JARED CURTIS

On Taking Life Lightly

MARILYN BOWMAN

Although my father and brothers are all techno wizards, my mother and I have always been in a special category that attracts techno-hell. The most recent hint I had was when I allowed Telus to take out my old roomy handset copper-wired telephones and install fibre-optics. I was surprised to learn that I had to go out and buy a set of cordless phones and get them all plugged into the new system. So far, so good. Reading the complex instruction manual was challenging so I took notes. Mostly I got the stuff working, but to date I have not figured out how to change my voicemail message. Friends who call me seem similarly flummoxed. One old friend leaves a message on voicemail that slowly and carefully enunciates her name, then she waits a long time before finally giving up and hanging up. The other friend announces her name on my voicemail, waits, then starts clicking on her phone's keys, to no particular avail. None of us have children or grandchildren to rescue us in these situations.

It turned out the new fibre-optic stuff displaced the old copper cables and now all kinds of other things were also connected to the new wiring, including my computer, cell-phone and tablet. The first time I noticed something new was when - as I lay in bed watching TV - suddenly a name and phone number appeared on the upper right corner of the TV set. It was identifying someone calling me on the new cordless phone! I rushed out to the phone, but was too late to get the live call.

The TV attacked me in a different way when I returned from a short trip. When I turned it on to watch my usual police procedurals from bed, the images kept stopping then breaking into pixels and the sound would stop. I checked all the plugs, fiddled around with on-screen 'troubleshooting' to no avail, hung in there for a few hours while reading at the same time, but it was hopeless and I couldn't hear enough dialogue to follow any plots. Same thing next night. I was almost resigned to trying to reach Telus the next day and get on some endless waiting-line for help, but didn't do it. On night three – everything worked. Yay! Then, on night four I was back to pixel madness. I had done nothing to change anything; it had its own agenda in full force.

Clock radios are a specialty for my indignation. I inherited a high-quality clock radio that turned out to require its Time to be set by satellite. Inside my house it couldn't read the satellite so I had to drag it outside attached to a long power cord and aim it at the sky, hoping a useful satellite would hover into position and set the correct time. Of course that setting all falters when changing to daylight savings time comes along. That clock radio has not told the correct time for a few years now. And other clock radios have their own fiendish features. Getting rid of an old one whose dial setting failed, I bought a small sleek item that seemed perfect: until I started to read the instructions. It turned out it was sleek because of the three knobs/buttons, each had one label, but had to serve two entirely different functions in combo with one of the other knobs, similarly not labelled for that double use. I managed to battle it into operation after re-writing all the instructions and experimenting, but now I let it rest on only one setting. I don't dare try to set an alarm, and can turn it on only by pressing an entirely flat, unmarked surface which represents the Sleep Timer switch! I can't remember how I even found the dial setting as there is no knob that does this, but at least I have found a volume push-button.

Travels reveal a new techno-hell. As you enter a hotel room with all your devices, you and your companion start to crawl around under the bed, behind the cupboards and so on to find all the power outlets. Each person needs power outlets for plugs for chargers, with their cords to hearing aids, watches, phones, tablets, air-machines. There is added fun if the power requires a European, English or American plug.

When we learned last year that SFU was changing our email system I dreaded the event, knowing full well I was capable of totally screwing it up. But the changeover turned to be painless as I slavishly followed instructions bolstered by Walter's extremely helpful guidance and encouragement to us in SFURA. Whew!! His tip to 'refresh' the SFU mail within seven days so that I don't have to go down and get my cellphone to call up an MFA authentication app to use with the computer has also been a great hit with me.

Although I have been able to add my name and other details to an application to participate in the annual *Art in the City* show as in previous years, this year the pdf form simply refused to take any insertions for my name and details. I fiddled around, downloaded a different app, tried many tricks, and all to no avail. The pdf Application form was resistant to all attempts to fill in my details. I still don't know what went wrong. I had to print it out, fill in the info by hand, photo it and send the photoed pages in that way. Ridiculous. Did Adobe change some subtle feature? I'll never know.

Then there is the issue of the connectedness of things. I originally got an Apple Watch as I live alone and it has a fall detection feature that you are able to disable if you do not need the SOS. It has worked admirably after 2 car crashes, smartly summoning the firemen first, then the rest. But after I bought a new car a few weeks ago my Watch started talking about my car. Last night it perked alive and told me that all 4 car doors were unlocked! Of course they were – it was in my basement garage protected by two sets of large locked garage doors! Busybody!!

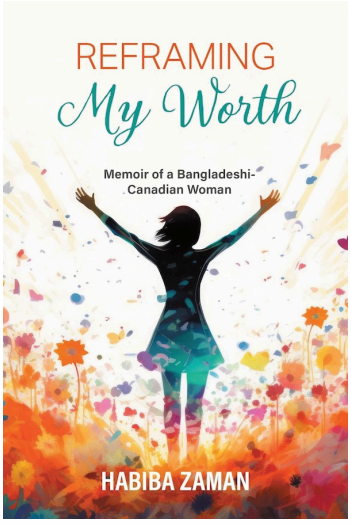
Although I know I am very competent in lots of techno ways, none of these come naturally, and every new wrinkle and device causes consternation. My struggles remind me of my mother's most exciting techno event. During the long dark days of the northern winter in our little village, she decided to make home-made lemon pop. She made the recipe, bottled it all carefully, and put it in the basement to "ripen". One evening, while my father was out working on the railway telegraph line in the dark winter, she was sitting reading when she heard a loud bang! Then another, and another! Explosions that sounded like gunfire! She soon realized the action was in our little dugout basement, so she rushed down. Aha! The pop was all exploding! She hadn't invented the best proportions for her concoction. What a mess.

That's how I feel about most of the techno-hell that attacks me. My all-time favorite techno tool that really works is a giant system for opening entrenched jar lids. It is a beautiful bright yellow large rubber belt strap air filter wrench for cars. You wind the 2 black belts around the lid in competing directions, tighten up the two belts and pull. Magic: Everything opens!!! Hooray for Canadian Tire! ✤

For a Good Read

Reframing My Life

PERSONAL MEMORIES AND LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GROWING UP IN BANGLADESH AND A JOURNEY TO CANADA / Reviewed by Tirthankar Bose



Writing about oneself is one of the hardest tasks one can take on, for, in essence, it is a task of self-discovery. "Know thyself" is easier said than done. It is harder still when self-discovery means reconstructing an often uncaring, even hostile world of material and human challenges. Yet that is just what Habiba Zaman has done in 'Reframing My Life' and in doing so has set an example of self-affirmation, indeed of self-creation, through a narrative that is the more memorable because it is plain-spoken. The one rhetorical flourish she allows herself is that of imagining the structures within which society forces individuals as frames of self-definition. It is an effective device, for thereby Zaman demonstrates how one may achieve independence by creating one's own frames—as she has done.

Her theme is her agency as she makes her way across barriers that are structural conditions of a world providing little opportunity for establishing and fostering an independent selfhood beyond set paths. In Zaman's case, any effort at self-establishment might have seemed blighted when she lost her father to a mere day-long sickness. To the trauma of suddenly losing a loving parent as a very young child were added the constraints of dependency on family charity, with the spectre of indigence never far behind.

Crises were constant. History itself was a rocky road. Her native land, then known as East Pakistan, was under strict control by West Pakistan, which was the more powerful part of the totality of Pakistan, and there were few avenues open for self-advancement. Lack of economic development and of social progress made violence endemic in the country and life uncertain. Long-established and regressive social customs made the world difficult, especially for a woman; when Zaman turned down a marriage proposal brought by a relative, he angrily wrote to her mother: "No gentleman from a noble family will marry your daughter." Undaunted and with the support of an equally strong mother, Zaman pursued her goal of a scholarly life, bending the framework of her social world to cleave to her purpose. "Reframing" is indeed a reality, not a mere word, for it is a measure of Zaman's worth and of her rise above her circumstances.

Rise, she did, not only above her immediate social situation, but also above the machinery of the institutions on which she had to rely, whether it was a college hostel for women where there was barely enough space to sleep, or facing constant scrutiny—including unkind gossip—as the first female faculty member at a university. Her survival, indeed her advancement in her career and personal life, owed neither to patronage nor to luck but exclusively to her own unrelenting efforts to broaden her knowledge constantly as a matter of self-improvement, not just career advancement, and to nurture those around her—her family, her students, and her colleagues.

While social constraints eased on moving to Canada, Zaman's institutional obstacles remained. The Canadian university where she wished to carry out her doctoral research had no provision for graduate work in her chosen discipline. Undeterred, this indomitable woman designed a program within that university tailored to her interest, and secured approval! In a long life of academic adventure, I have never heard of anything so triumphant. This story, told without fanfare, marks not only Zaman's rise through hurdles but, more importantly, her resolute journey as a scholar committed both to intellectual advancement and to the scrutiny of the social and moral needs that drive learning and ensure its relevance.

These accounts of Zaman's relentless effort to bend circumstances to her ideals are the more arresting because they are told matter of factly, without self-congratulation, let alone boasting. Rather, she takes pleasure recording every step of her debt to all who held out helping hands. Her mother was not only a loving, protective force, but also a moral beacon. The conventional family and clan structure of Bangladeshi society in itself was part of Zaman's capital, its constant intrusiveness proving—amazingly—to be an inexhaustible resource, always remembered with love. Her fortitude is matched by her pleasure in remembering everyone from whom she received any help whatsoever, from a kindly school principal to an elderly relative who gave her shelter in the cruel days of Bangladesh's struggle for independence, to mentors at universities, and to friends in Canada who stood by her in easing her daily life. And then there's the constant fountain of her strength, her husband, whose calm wisdom and shining intellect have been her inexhaustible resource.

An uplifting story, this reprise of Professor Zaman's life, more perhaps because of her battle to reframe an often indifferent world to match her unique selfhood than for the crown she wins. ✤

ITS ALL ABOUT YOU

Member Doings

Marilyn Bownan Exbited her latest paintings at the Largest Art Market in Vancouver BC's historic West End. The event was held May 2nd to the 5th at the West End Community Centre

This issue's bonus feature is the SFURA Newsletter from May 2007: https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/retirees/Newsletters/2007/2007_1_May.pdf . See what the retirees were doing that month. ✤

Double your donation! The SFU Retirees Association will be matching the first $5,000 donated to our new scholarship.

SFURA Scholarship for First-Generation Graduate Students

To mark SFU's 60th anniversary, the SFU Retirees Association (SFURA) is launching a new scholarship fund dedicated to first-generation graduate students.

Graduate school presents unique challenges. This scholarship will provide support for students who are the first members of their families to navigate the complexities of graduate education.

Our goal is to raise $40,000 to create an endowment that will provide annual financial support to graduate students in perpetuity.

Why Focus on First-Generation Graduate Students?
Many SFURA members were once first-generation graduate students ourselves, so we understand the challenges:

- Lack of academic mentorship — Navigating graduate school without the support of family members familiar with academic culture
- Cultural and social barriers — Learning unwritten expectations, from conference etiquette to securing research funding
- Intersectional challenges — Many first-generation graduate students come from backgrounds that reflect poverty, immigration, and underrepresented communities

Join Us in Making a Difference
By contributing to this scholarship, you are investing in the next generation of scholars, leaders, and change-makers. Your support will help ensure that SFU remains a place where all students—regardless of background—can thrive in graduate studies and beyond. Together, we can create even more opportunities for SFU's first-generation graduate students.

To donate or learn more, visit **www.sfu.ca/retirees/grad-scholarship.html**

All donations are tax-deductible, and you will receive a tax receipt.

In Memoriam

We post names of all deceased SFU retirees of whom we are aware. We welcome tributes to your former colleagues. We will place them with their obituaries on the website.

Sheila Margaret Roberts A faculty member of the English Department.
See: https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/in-memoriam/n_s.html
Margaret Berger formerly Associate Professor in the Division of Interdisciplinary Studies [German]
See: https://www.sfu.ca/english/news-events/news/2025/in-memoriam--stephen-black.html
Laurence Kitching German Studies (now named the Department of Global Humanities)
See: https://www.sfu.ca/retirees/in-memoriam/h_m.html
Milt McClaren Faculty of Education
Royal Roads published a tribute: https://www.royalroads.ca/news/remembering-dr-milt-mcclaren

N-O- . . . R-E-A-L-L-Y old — like S-E-N-I-O-R-S

MEGUIDO ZOLA

School teaching and educating teachers have been my calling, which I define as work that keeps making more of me. As these come to an end, I am thinking of turning to tutoring.

But I realize I actually know nothing about tutoring.

On the other hand, I remember, I have lots of experience being tutored

* * *

From my earliest years, born in Cairo, as a child of Holocaust refugees from Vienna and Vilnius, I have weekly tutoring in Arabic. This is to complement the lingua franca French we speak at home and at the Lycée français du Caire I attend as my school; the Yiddish of my extended family; and the Hebrew of my after-school classes in synagogue.

Arabic is my favourite tutoring. I love reciting the verb conjugations; chanting noun declensions; and deciphering the flowing cursive calligraphy, with its dizzying flights of dots, edges, curves, and points.

Daily, I memorize the noun and adjective declensions and verb conjugations to recite and chant back to Samir, my smiling tutor.

Malik, the street food vendor below our apartment, at 39 Soliman Pasha, rewards my occasional public performances for him with a steamy, aromatic ta'ameya, the crispy-fried falafel of ground fava beans and herbs rolled in sesame seeds.

And around the corner from our apartment, at the horse carriage taxi stand, Osman sits me next to him on his coachman's high bench to hear my recitations; as a reward, I get to feed Fahad, his sweaty-smelling old nag, a handful of dried figs or dates.

But my lessons are abruptly aborted when Samir, my smiling young tutor, complains — not for the first time, I now hear — that I am disrespectful and insolent; that I have more than once uttered unseemly expressions of the street; and even, in a fit of pique, knocked the red tarboosh off my tutor's forehead.

My mother giggles because the bawdy street language I've picked up — some, from my occasional street playmates but most of it from her — is a source of irreverent delight for her. My father, strict and solemn, is not amused.

I grieve the loss of my tutoring; I miss my friend Samir, the smiling young tutor; and I puzzle over my offences.

These tutoring memories — and others, such as the years of after-school tutoring in Latin and Greek in boarding school in Kenya — come back to me when I start tutoring English, over seventy-five years later.

* * *

My first tutee is Luna, eight years old, in grade 3; her mother has asked for tutoring in English conversation for Luna because Luna speaks Mandarin at home and doesn't have much opportunity to practice English at school, since most of her peers are Mandarin-speaking.

Luna is waiting for me on the back patio of her spacious condominium, in a gated, leafy part of the university campus. She sports a streamlined unisex bowl-cut hairstyle, set off by a rockin' red sweatshirt with just one side of the drawstring out, for that carefree 'I don't have to look like I really tried to be so fashionable' look.

Strong, assured, a honed sense of agency — these are my first impressions of Luna. . . with streaks of the wild child about her.

Her intent gaze and mischievous grin are momentarily disconcerting; emphasized by the contrast of her grandparents standing meekly behind her.

They step forward now, as I acknowledge them. They smile broadly, bow humbly, and, in Mandarin accompanied by elaborate gesturing, they welcome me.

No sign of my employer, Luna's mother, whom I later nearly trip over as we leave Luna's Room: she is eavesdropping outside Luna's room, slouching on the floor, suckling the new baby that Luna will complain about at every session.

Upstairs, in her room, Luna and I take our seats. We sit side by side — but not face to face — at a long work table at a magnificent picture window overlooking neighbours' courtyards.

Hesitantly, I introduce myself — to the side of Luna's head.

I clear my throat for attention; to signal a formal commencement to the proceedings. I launch on a mumbled ramble about why I'm here.

Luna is busy sorting a mess of assorted coloured paper and pencils on her desk.

"Let's play," she tosses carelessly.

Over time, I learn the conventions and 'rules' of tutoring my first tutee, once a week, as a guest, an intruder, in her home.

Luna likes to play. The tutoring will be play sessions. Luna has to be in charge of the play. She chooses the play, she directs the play, and she controls the play.

Luna has to be in control. Luna has to be right. And, if the play is in the form of a game or competition, Luna has to win.

I follow my instincts, honed by the years, to 'kidwatch' for guidance. Observe and follow the child. Trust her to reveal to me what she needs to experience to learn.

At times, though, I'm beset by doubt. Guilt. Fear of being 'found out' not tutoring in the 'normal' sense.

I may be wasting Luna's time, taking the family's money on false pretenses.

On top of that, I fret over Luna's playfully grabbing me in a headlock, now and then, when I'm slow to understand or follow her; or sitting back and companionably throwing a leg

over onto my lap when she's feeling relaxed and magnanimous. I can't just immediately wriggle out of the situation without hurting her feelings — still less correct or admonish her.

We play all kinds of paper and pencil games. Dots and Boxes. Hangman. Battleship. Tic-tac-toe. Ultimate tic-tac-toe. Bulls and Cows. Mash. Sprouts. Foldovers.

I'm a consistent good loser. And only occasionally do I question Luna's cryptic, arcane logic and reasoning.

We talk, discuss, and argue. That is true language practice, in real-life contexts, I comfort myself.

And surely the cootie catcher joke games have some formal language value — for example:

Q: 'Why shouldn't you tell an Easter egg a joke?'
A: 'It might crack up.'

But these word jokes, conundrums, and riddles can be too sophisticated for any child, and Luna makes up the responses or interprets them in her own slant ways.

We do have some conversation. In the brief conversations I manage now and then to snatch with Luna, she is given to lamenting and complaining.

Her mother is nursing and fussing over a new baby and has little time for Luna.

Her grandparents don't play with her: they don't understand her games. Grandma's attention is focused on forever running after Luna to feed her tidbits of her cooking.

A refrain in Luna's litany of grievances is their home — palatial by my standards: it's crowded and cramped.

"And it's even worse in China! We live in an apartment there."

"**WORSE**? That means, it's bad here. But what's bad here, Luna?

"We live in a house that's cut up in two." (*Referring to the fancy duplex style.*)

"An old man and an old woman live next door," Luna tells me one day, as we look down from our perch at the picture window into the neighbour's courtyard.

"Oh. . . maybe they have children you could be friends with and play with?"

"No, they're **OLD**, I said. Didn't you **HEAR** me?"

"**Some** old people can have children. . . " I respond, suitably chastened.

"**N-O**- . . . they're **R-E-A-L-L-Y** old — (*with exasperation*) like **S-E-N-I-O-R-S.**"

"Oh, I see. Wow! Seniors: yes, that **is** really old. I didn't realize."

"I wonder," I ask another time. Am I old? Am I senior?" I ask.

(*Pause.*) " You're **BIGGER**."

"D'you mean 'older'? We say 'older' in English."

"No, in Chinese, we say 'bigger', not 'older'," she corrects.

"Right. Sorry. Bigger. I'm bigger. But I don't **feel** bigger. So, I'm wondering . . . how can you tell?"

"By **LOOKING** at you — **OF COURSE**!"

"True. So, what do you see that tells you?"

(*No response.*)

Another week, I get an update on the old couple next door. Luna volunteers that the man is 'African'.

"What does **THAT** mean?"

"His skin is black."

"And his wife? What colour skin does she have?"

(*Pause.*)

"Like you," she says after a moment.

"Hmmm. . . Kind of brown?"

(*Ignores this.*)

"It's a different wife. He broke up with his other wife, and now he has a new one."

"Nice," I say: "All shiny and new."

"Not 'shiny,'" Luna does not miss an opportunity to correct me. "We don't say 'shiny' for a wife,".

"Oh?"

"'Shiny' is for toys and stuff..."

"'New', then. Not 'old' like her husband."

"Hmm."

" I mean 'big,'" I correct myself. "Is she big? I forgot that you say 'big' in Chinese, not 'old'."

(*Losing interest in where this is going.*)

"Yes."

"How can you tell?"

(*Pause. Then, catapulting from her easy chair; sticking her face into mine.*)

"She has lines like you!" *Luna traces a finger under my eyes. (Falls back into her easy chair.*)

* * *

And so on it goes. Luna and I following our roles as we muddle through this tutoring-cum-play and talk therapy process. I am the benign, avuncular would-be mentor, a little bit awkward, slow, and absent-minded. Luna charges ahead, a young, vital, confident explorer, filled with a nonchalant sense of agency as she learns to connect and interact with her world. ✤

PHOTO:: OLD PEOPLE CONVERSING / CRISTINA GOTTARDI/ UNSPLASH

Editor's Notes

MARCIA TOMS

This is an editorial with four faces. Horror, surprise, reflection, and relief. In Vancouver, residents have had a difficult and heartbreaking 10 days. The lively atmosphere at the Filipino community's *Lapu Lapu Day* festival on Saturday April 26th shattered when a vehicle smashed into the crowd, killing 11 and sending many more critically injured to hospital. Shattered, but not destroyed and immediately lifted up by community support, memorials, and kindness.

The federal election on April 28th brought surprise to just about every Canadian. Early on, the federal Conservative Party, steered by Pierre Poilievre, seemed in a slam-dunk winner's position. Still, it blew a 25 % lead in the polls. Poilievre lost his Ottawa region seat and the Liberals – Canada's 'natural governing party '– emerged with a minority government. The New Democratic Party (NDP) with only 7 seats, had its worst showing ever. While in 1958 its CCF predecessor did elect only 8 MPs, it was in a far smaller parliament. The Quebec-only Bloc Quebecois held onto 23 seats with about 6.5 % of the vote, the same as the NDP. This last stat is among the stranger things of Canada's First Past the Post electoral system.

Canada's election was presaged by that other election, the one endured by our southern neighbours. The not-so-new president immediately announced a volley of tariffs accompanied by threats to make Canada 'the 51st state' and continuous references to 'Governor Trudeau.' These insults inspired a host of responses, and the explosion of a new Canadian nationalism. They also influenced the Canadian election, with the new Liberal leader, banker Mark Carney, perceived as the best bet to take on both the president and the task of building productive relations with Europe, Asia, and Commonwealth nations.

I was born and raised in Canada, as were my parents, both veterans who volunteered - the army and the navy - during World War Two. On occasion my family spent parts of summer vacations in western American states. In coastal California, Oregon and Washington it was hard for me - a child - to tell the difference between Canada and the USA, not only in landscape, but also in people. When I was a teenager with friends who had driver's licences and cars, we thought nothing of driving to Bellingham for a day. No passport, no paper ID. And yet, there must have been something.

My first experience of that something came when Dad piled the five of us into the car and took us to a local drive-in movie. 1962's 'The Longest Day' was the much heralded 'true story' of D-Day and Dad was determined to educate us. It was not only a long day, but a long movie, and although we were all tired, Dad was agitated. When it ended, he went up one side of the car, across the ceiling and down the other. He was furious. It turned out the story told wasn't 'true' at all. "As usual," he said, "the Yanks took credit for everything. They didn't even get there (the war) until 1942, and waited until Hitler declared war on them. And before I forget: they can't march, they can't salute, and their headgear? Always sloppy." On it went, in a similar vein: "What about Juno Beach? What about Canada's deep intrusion into Fortress Europe on that day?" Shortly thereafter I learned from Dad that Canada (tiny population of only 12 million) was regarded so highly that it had been granted its own beach. That prior to D-Day, Canadian sacrifice at Dieppe prepared the way for Operation Overlord. And that by 1945 the Canadian Navy was the world's third largest. It was incipient nationalism from a Red Tory and it did not subside until the day he died.

That something – Canadian nationalism – has never been as pointed, as loud or as confident as it is at present. Despite WW2, I am not comfortable with nationalism, it so easily slides into jingoism and then imperial designs. I don't like hockey and I only watch it when the Canadian women are playing the USA. Yet I find myself agreeing that 'Elbows Up' is a catchy slogan. I'm not buying American food. I'm boycotting travel to the USA, where I've rarely gone in the past 25 years anyway, so it's not a hardship. I understand booing the US anthem.

Ours is a unique form of nationalism. It first takes sharp aim at our nearest neighbour, and only after that, extolls Canadian virtues. History might offer a reason or two for this. Take the war of 1812, newly appreciated in the past two months. British troops, defending British North America from the newly wrought United States, invaded and did, indeed, burn down the old White House. Apparently, it needed repairs anyway. Whether it can rightly be said that actual Canadians burnt down the presidential residence remains a matter of enthusiastic debate, at least among some.

And then there was the short-lived annexation petition of the 1840s that circulated among Montrealers. It went nowhere. From 1858 through 1963, gold discoveries in the Fraser Canyon and Caribou of Britain's mainland British Columbia colony brought an onslaught of Americans. Governor James Douglas, noticing the hordes and the war they started with the Fraser Canyon's First Nations, recruited 600 Black Americans to the colony and hired 100 of them to be Victoria's first police force: The First African Rifles, banking that they would be loyal to the Crown.

As the Northwest was colonized and settled in the late 1800s, Indigenous and Metis people had to face the great threat posed by Easterners from BNA, legions of Americans pouring in from the south to claim land and the machinations of the Northwest Mounted police, formed precisely to keep the First Nations in check. In the Northwest Rebellions, Louis Riel, Gabriel Dumont, Chief Poundmaker, and many others resisted. They were, perhaps, the first real Canadian nationalists, setting the stage for Manitoba and Saskatchewan to join Confederation rather than be annexed by the USA.

And so, it continues. I have a small maple leaf pin that my Mum always wore on her many travels. I have yet to put it on. But I just might.

This issue of '*Simon Says*' is wide-ranging. We have two first-time contributors and we thank those who responded to our request for Travel Stories. We go from Africa to South America to the UK. **Meguido Zola** travels back in time and gives us a story about tutoring kids. And much more. Our champion contributor, **Ezzat Fattah** offers thoughtful words on both Restorative Justice and Capital Punishment. Once more, we have a book review by newcomer Tirthankar Bose and we are glad. 'Bussing it' takes on new possibilities in **Sheila Delany**'s Writing on the Edge. And **Jill Mandrake** brings the historic, but no longer with us Pantages Theatre on Hastings back to life. It reminded me that in the early 1970s when, as a cinema it ran Hong Kong made Kung Fu movies, I saw many with a friend and that, the last time I visited, another friend and I walked out after only 20 minutes of Alejandro Jodorowsky's '*El Topo*.'

The weather here in Vancouver has been warm and wonderful, and I plan to read '*Simon Says*' in hard copy while flaked out on the outdoor couch, protected by a large red umbrella. Wherever you are, whatever the weather, I hope you enjoy this issue. Please let us know if you do, but also if you don't!