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Left: The Lion and the Hedge Hog, an ice carving by Barry Collier, Kelly Davies and Stephen Chung, stood in front of the Eastwood Community League Hall during the 14th Annual Deep Freeze: A Byzantine Winter Fete.

Below: This ice carving of a beaver on a log was another of the many ice carving done by Barry Collier, Kelly Davies and Stephen Chung. It was installed at Borden Park for the Fete.

Photos by John Zapantis



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ALBERTA STREET NEWS

Founder/Publisher/
Editor, Design and layout:
Linda Dumont

Writers:

John Zapantis
Joanne Benger
Allan Sheppard
Sharon Austin
Timothy Wild
Linda Dumont
Jessica Pollard
Jim Gurnett
Angelique Branston

Photos:

John Zapantis
Linda Dumont
Epic Photography

Cover photo:

John Zapantis

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Alberta Street News
9533-106A Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5H 0S9
780-975 -3903
dumontlc@hotmail.com

Web:
albertastreetnews.org

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Ensuring decent housing for all Albertans

By Jim Gurnett

The Alberta government undertook a hasty review of affordable housing in Alberta that submitted its report to government in early October. In mid-December the government responded. Then, on the eve of a new year, the Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness (ECOH) challenged the government to make housing security more than a drastically underfunded incidental in its agenda.

"We need a clear New Year's resolution from Premier Jason Kenney that 2021 will be the year we commit to adequate funding to address the housing crisis devastating the lives of far too many people," asserts ECOH president Laura Murphy.

The government-appointed review panel report indicates a half a million Albertans (one in nine people!) are spending more than the 30 percent of income for housing. Thirty percent is considered the maximum a person should spend to not create challenges with other living costs. Over 165,000 families meet the definition of being in core housing need and 20,000 are on waiting lists for subsidized housing, lists so long they are meaningless.

"The housing crisis in Alberta is a prescription for further human and economic disaster. The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the challenges people have to meet even the most basic preventive health measures without proper housing," Murphy notes.

The government has accepted the recommendations of the review panel, but ECOH finds most of the recommendations vague and unlikely to support housing developers or service providers to plan well for action.

"The government says it wants to be a funder and partner in addressing housing needs, but the absence of any

commitment to a significant increase in funding support for housing leaves most of the recommendations on shaky ground. And the promise of a strategic plan for housing without a commitment to include the human right to housing in legislation is not encouraging," Murphy says.

While the recommendations accept the need for rent subsidies for some people, they are silent on the need to take a stronger approach to rent regulations, as exist in most provinces, or to eviction prevention. There is no indication the government will re-consider the reductions in rent subsidies announced in the provincial budget earlier in the year. The recommendations also ignore the evidence that the most successful and effective non-market housing is done by the social profit/not-for-profit sector and housing cooperatives, where the majority of funding should be targeted. In its submission to the review panel, ECOH urged the government to use better income assistance programs for low-income Albertans as a way to enable people to address their own housing challenges.

"When income support programs and minimum wage jobs are not adequate to make ends meet, people are condemned to live in 'Pay the rent or feed the children' misery, never free of eviction anxieties," Murphy observes.

"It has been 13 years since the last time the government studied housing security issues. During that time homelessness has cursed thousands of our neighbours, and many more have had to survive in housing that is too expensive, dangerous, unhealthy, insecure, and without needed supports. One significant way to recover well post-pandemic would be for the government to show leadership by real action to assure there are good homes for all. Without such a resolution for 2021, the review panel's report has little value," Murphy concludes. For comment: Laura Murphy (587-357-6285 or lauramurphy001@gmail.com)

THE VIEWS PRESENTED ARE THOSE OF THE CONTRIBUTORS.

March Hack Ham

By Joanne Benger

March, hack, ham, comes in like a lion goes out like a lamb. March is Irish Heritage Month as well as Fraud Awareness Month, Beware the leprechaun and the unicorn and don't invest in shamrocks. The pot of gold can be fools gold.

The first week is also Epilepsy Awareness Month, National Kidney Month, National Nutrition Month and Red Cross Month.

The first week of March, March 1 to 6, is Social Work Week. Be nice to those who have dedicated their lives to helping people.

March 1 is World Compliment Day. Try to say something nice to everyone you meet. March 1 is also St. David's Day. He is the Patron Saint of Wales and lived on nothing but bread and leeks.

March 3 is St. Winnai's Day which usually brings a storm. 'First comes David, next comes Chad, then comes Winnai roaring mad.' Hunker down and read the Cat in the Hat for this is the birthday of Dr. Suess.

March 6, 1912 the Oreo cookie was sold for the first time. Dunk and enjoy your Oreo.

The second week of March, March 7 – 13, is World Glaucoma Week. Check your tears at 40 years. March 7 – 13 is also Women's Week for March 8 is International Women's Day. Women must be empowered with self confidence and self esteem.

March 9 is Barbie Doll's birthday. Her age? 62 but she doesn't look it. Happy birthday, Barbie.

March 14, 2020 is the day everything closed down for the pandemic. We have now survived a year of lock downs, restrictions, isolation, quarantines, masking and distancing. Let's celebrate the fact that we are survivors, and today is Grimaldi Day. Joseph Grimaldi (1779-1837) invented the modern clown's dress with painted face, red nose and large feet. Dress like a clown, sing Lord of the Dance and clown around. Then eat your favourite pie for today is also pi day, pi being 3.14. And don't forget to turn your clock forward for Daylight Saving Time begins today.

March 17 is St. Patrick's Day. Wear green and drink green beer.

March 20 is the Vernal Equinox, the first day of spring.

March 22 is National Goof-Off Day. Don't take yourself so seriously. Laugh. It is also Crepes Day. Crepes are the rich French cousin of our pancake and can be eaten plain, stuffed or rolled. Fill them with turkey, mushroom or cheese for your main of course. Roll them with jam or crushed berries and whipped cream for dessert.

March 27 Pesach or Passover begins. It lasts from the 14th to the 22nd of Nisan, and recalls the exodus of the Jews led by Moses from Egypt. Matzah, unleavened bread, is eaten. Passover will end on April 4.

March 29 is Holi. Tricks are played as on Aril Fools Day.

And now a word to the wise. March 29-31 are unlucky days to seek a loan so no matter how tough times are, wait until April to apply for that money.



The Irish Bull

By Joanne Benger

The Irish bull is a unique form of humour in which a seemingly serious statement makes nonsense and contradicts itself. John Portland Mahaffy called it a freak of language and then gave this example: "The Irish bull is always pregnant." Here are some Irish bulls to brighten your day:

1. An Irishman sold his frying pan explaining, "I needed money to get something to cook in it."
2. An elderly man said, "I hope to live long enough to hear you sing that beautiful hymn at my funeral."
3. No one goes to that café anymore because it is too crowded there is nowhere to park.
4. I had to take so much medicine I was sick a long time after I got well.
5. We were children together, at least I was.
6. This shovel will last forever and then it can be recycled as scrap metal.
7. He never met his father and his mother died before he was born.
8. You will be hanged and let that teach you a lesson.
9. I danced all night until the party ended at ten and then I played cards until midnight.

Public Inquiries and Monsters unseen

By Timothy Wild

Without doubt, one of the most chilling songs I have ever heard is Josh Ritter's "The Torch Committee". The brutality, frenetic pace and bleakness hits me every time I listen to it. The song tells the tale of a person who is taken from their home in the middle of the night, stripped naked, bound to a chair in blatant violation of their rights and interrogated by The Torch Committee about the presence of "monsters" in the polity. The members of the Committee seem to be genuinely bewildered about the person's presence before them and suggest that there must be some mistake as to why the individual was brought there. The Inquisitor, recognising the detainee's assumed loyalty to the state, suggests the misunderstanding can quickly be remedied if the person looks at "Appendix 3" and points to the names of those less innocent. Appendix 3 contains the names of relatives and friends but, as noted by the Interrogator, "it's them or us or them or you". The person names names, is thanked and released. He is given a torch to provide light for his guilt and fear fueled broken walk home.

As they say, timing is everything and Ritter's song got me thinking about the UCP's risible inquiry into the foreign funding of anti-Alberta energy campaigns. I want to be very clear here. I am not suggesting that the UCP government's Public Inquiry is the same as the Torch Committee mentioned above. But what is similar is the fact that a Committee or Public Inquiry has been struck to deal with a perceived enemy; in this case, shadowy "outsiders" who fund campaigns critical of the energy sector in our province. The process of this inquiry is enveloped in an opaque shroud of secrecy, and the exercise seems designed to root out "enemies" to the ideology of the current government, rather than deal with valid opposition and concerns about Alberta's energy policy within the messy and transparent process of democracy. I would argue that the Inquiry and the related "War Room" are both tools used by the UCP Government to turn attention from their obvious and demonstrated inability to handle the current economic situation towards the perceived malefi-

cence of "others".

When Premier Kenney won the 2019 election he indicated that he would immediately turn the economy around and get people back to work. Obviously, this was not the case. And to be honest, electoral preening aside, I am not sure that many folks actually took him at his word. But in July 2019 Premier Kenney, under the Public Inquiries Act, initiated a review of anti-Alberta energy campaigns. The point seemed to be that it was the unfair criticism of the energy sector that was at the root of our province's economic problem, and if we could just catch the foreign rascals behind the spread of this propaganda and expose them, the boom days of yore would return. I know, right?

I had planned to write an article on the results of the Inquiry which was due on January 31. This date was an extension to the previous deadline of the fall 2020. However, the Inquiry Panel has asked for a further extension until May 31, 2021. Perhaps this is an indication of where there is no smoke there is no fire? Or maybe this is an example of the UCP making inaccurate assessments of issues and offering wild, ideologically laden responses? Regardless, I think it is reflective of how out of touch the UCP government is with local, national and global currents.

But I suppose much of this is moot, given President Biden's executive order to cancel the Keystone Project. We also know that Prime Minister Trudeau doesn't seem to really have much skin in the traditional Alberta oil game, particularly as Quebec seems determined to continue to buy from the Saudi regime. These are pretty well known facts, and we don't need a public inquiry to tell us that the markets for our products are shrinking or are in peril. The tragedy is that we have known this for quite a long time, and the Conservative and UCP provincial governments have failed to respond accordingly. For them, economic planning seemed to be anathema, and Conservative energy policy was based on devout supplication to the brutal rhythm of the market.

For example, when the Conservatives created the Heritage Savings Trust Fund, one of the desired outcomes was to strengthen and diversify Alberta's economy. This was based on the experience of other oil producing entities, such as Norway, and of the recognition that

there would come – however distant – a time of post oil. However, the Conservatives subsequently changed the wording of the legislation and regulations of the Heritage Fund to strengthen or diversify. Explicitly reducing the need to diversify and move beyond the heavy overreliance on our natural gas and oil sectors. We all know that it was good for many of us while it lasted, but now we are in the position of having a product that even our closest ally doesn't want, particularly in its crude form. The province didn't expand on its refining capacity and, at the same time, failed to accommodate the growing public sentiment against carbon use. Most importantly, there is the ecological imperative to respond to human-influenced climate change which is rapidly approaching the 2 degree Celsius global warming tipping point. Peddling the myth of "clean coal" will not help.

Yet, despite the above, the UCP government placed its faith in the hunt for monsters. This quixotic adventure, directed in part by Commissioner Steve Allan from California, is late, over budget and facing problems with the process of consultation and the objective credibility of their evidence. As trenchantly argued by NDP MLA Kathleen Ganley the inquiry is "an embarrassment that is hurting our international reputation and could have negative impacts on investments and our energy industry." The Official Opposition has also asked that Steve Allan be removed from his position. I agree. To me, the Inquiry was ill conceived and poorly timed, and is a complete and utter farce.

Rather than trying to develop a naughty list perhaps Mr. Kenney needs to look at other options and plan for a transition away from oil dependence? The time for extensions is past, and we need vision, leadership and action. We require plans for a transition to other forms of energy and ways of living, and we must ensure that this transition is just from both a provincial and a global perspective. The poor – locally and globally – should not pay for the crisis. As noted by Evan Durbin we need "the substitution of conscious foresight for the instinctive adjustments of the competitive system". But time is running out. The time for navel gazing and looking for scapegoats is over. Albertans deserve better than this supernatural exercise in futility.

Celebrating St. Patrick's Day

By Joanne Bengier

On St. Patrick's Day everyone is Irish so greet everyone with, "Top o' the morning to you" to which the reply is "And the rest of the day to you."

Actually 17% of Albertans and 15% of Canadians are really of Irish descent. 100,000 Irish immigrants came to Canada in 1847 to escape the dreadful potato famine. At that time potatoes had become the staple diet of the poor and it was said that a man could live on 15 pounds of potatoes a day plus a little buttermilk. In the song *My Potato*, we find these lines, "Sublime potatoes! That from Atrim's shore to famous Kerry form the poor man's store." And there was a saying, "He was as Irish as new potato right down to the warts." When the blight caused potatoes to rot in the ground a lot of people starved. Those who came to Canada were not always warmly welcomed. Job ads would often state, 'Irish need not apply'. The Irish had to take the humblest of jobs and soon proved themselves as very reliable and hard working.

In 1921 Canada had a further influx of Irish political immigrants who were fleeing 'The Dublin of troubles'. They proudly brought St. Patrick and their culture with them 100 years ago and we have been celebrating with them ever since.

The Irish are a social lot, but as the Irish bull goes, "It is great to be alone especially if your sweetheart is with you." So let's celebrate this year alone. You can wear green, the national colour of Ireland or you can dress like the marchers in the St. Patrick's Day parade, who often wear gold for Ireland's sun and blue for its many lakes. Begin by toasting yourself with a pint of Guinness or stout. The traditional toast is 'Dia's Muire ihuit. (God and Mary with you) to which the reply is 'Dia's Muire ihuit agus Patrick' (God and Mary and Patrick). Another toast is 'To a dry roof, a warm hearth and food on the table'. There is only one rule of thumb for the party – 'Where there's an Irishman, there's always a lot of laughing singing and loving.'

The Irish reel is part of every party. When Irish peasants weren't allowed to dance the reel they found a way to dance indoors. They had divided front doors and opened the top half while keeping the



bottom half closed. Dancing in the house, facing the door they could be seen by all passing by without breaking the law. Our picture windows would be even better.

Dance the reel following this description written by Hemrini Kavenaugh in 1915. 'Backwards and forward, side step and turn, cross over again, bow to his partner and hammer the floor.'

It has been said that the Irish are always singing about battles, death and graveyards but they have fun songs, too. They sing *Kitty of Culeran*, *Grammachree Molly*, *Spring of Shillaugh* and the *Walls of Limerick* and then they sing, "Oh, Mister Patrick McGinty/An Irishman of note/He fell into a fortune, and/He bought himself a goat" and "Paddy wrote a letter/To his Irish Molly-oh/Saying if you don't receive/Please write and let me know."

Now for a bit of fortune telling. Get a bowlful of potatoes and choose one using the children's counting out game, 'Riggidy, higgidy, wiggidy, rig/paddy dances an Irish jig/While feeding potatoes to his pig/Riggidy, higgidy, wiggidy rig/out goes you'.

Take the chosen potato and count its eyes to tell your fortune. 1 – enemy, 2 – presents 3 – friends 4 – lover 5 – travel 6 – courtship 7 – wealth 8 – broken heart 9 – happy marriage 10 – single blessedness.

After the dancing and drinking and singing comes the supper. We have a choice of three beverages, no, make it four. Green beer is made by adding drops of green food colouring to a mug of beer. A Guinness Ice Cream Float is made by serving a scoop of vanilla ice cream in a glass

Left - St. Patrick
Saint Patrick's Day, or the Feast of Saint Patrick is a cultural and religious celebration held on March 17, the traditional death date of Saint Patrick (c. 385 – c. 461), the foremost patron saint of Ireland.

of Guinness. Add a green straw. Irish coffee is made by mixing a jigger of whiskey with a teaspoon of sugar, then filling the mug with strong hot coffee and topping it with whipped cream. It has been said, "Irish coffee provides in a single glass all the four essential food groups – alcohol, caffeine, sugar and fat", and "Irish whiskey is pure angel's milk."

The fourth option is tea. When I was in Ireland and I ordered tea, I was given a huge potful of tea which the waitress kept topping up throughout the meal.

The traditional menu is Irish stew served with soda bread which the Irish often refer to as cake. We can also go back in time and eat a meal of boiled potatoes served with buttermilk.

At the close of any party or visit there are the wonderful Irish blessings that send the guest on his way. 'May the Good Lord take a liking to you but not too soon.' Or 'May God be with you. May your journey be short and your burden light.' 'May a star lead you, the wind be at your back, the road rise up to meet you and God hold you in the hollow of his hand.' 'May you live as long as you want, and never want as long as you live.' 'May you be in heaven an hour before the Devil knows you are dead.' 'May there always be work for you to do, May your purse hold a coin or two.' 'May you have walls for the wind, And a roof over your head/And drinks beside the fire/ Laughter to cheer you/those you love near you/And all you may desire.'

FICTION

The Idea Man

By Sharon Austin

The morning sun is just coming up tinting the sky with pink and gold as I walk down the quiet deserted streets of my home town. I can smell the salt spray in the light breeze from the bay not far away. I have travelled so many places as a journalist but when I come home I know how blessed I was to grow up in this sleepy town where the only drama was what we made ourselves. Up ahead I see the town square with the big white and gold gazebo surrounded by the golden glow of daffodils and beds of pink and purple tulips and I remember the singing, the dancing, the picnics and even a wedding that happened there. As I draw closer, my heart sinks for the tall white columns are covered in the ugly bloated printing of graffiti, scrawling meaningless words meant only to bring ruin. The white paint on the benches is blistered and peeling and last years hanging pots are drooping with brown dead flowers. Even the flower beds need care and old musty leaves cover the gazebo's cement floor. As I sit there on a weathered white bench I remember that day twenty years ago when the Idea Man mysteriously appeared in our town and changed everything.

It was a cold day in February when the town was digging out from a howling nor'easter that had dumped two feet of snow followed by freezing rain that I met Pierre. A tall thin man with a black moustache and a long wool top coat breezed in to our small general store. He tipped his hat to my mother and introduced himself with a French accent. He told us that he had bought the Mason mansion that had stood empty for the last five years and planned to return it to its former glory days. He was looking for a young man who would be his driver as he had no car and did not drive.

Right away my mother volunteered me and I was happy to do it as I was sixteen and eager to drive anywhere. As we walked to my car we passed Mr. Lester shovelling his walk and cursing loudly. Pierre stopped and turning to me said quietly, "Some men curse the snow but I see the challenge, man against the elements. I see the beauty too. Are there not diamonds glistening there in the field and look how the frost has painted feathers

and ferns in the windows."

Mr. Lester glared at us, sneering at Pierre's lofty words. Soon I was driving Pierre everywhere and when we weren't going to the library or touring the town we worked on the mansion. Needing more help, I suggested my friend Sebastian come and work for him. Sebastian lived with his mother and sister on the wrong side of the tracks and the towns folks looked down on them. His father had run off and his mother worked cleaning houses for "The Upper Crust." The women of "The Upper Crust" met every week for a book club but my mother said they just gossiped and started rumours. When Pierre saw Sebastian's dilapidated shack with its sagging door and cracked window I heard him say: "This can not be, we must do what we can to lift other's up."

Pierre hired all three of them to fix and clean the mansion and moved them into the downstairs apartment. I remember Sebastian's mother standing at the sink weeping as the warm water poured over her red chapped hands. It was the first time that she had running water and she was overwhelmed. I felt ashamed that I, like everyone else, had just accepted their situation and done nothing to help.

Spring came and the mansion gleamed like a jewel with its fresh white paint and pale grey gables. Pierre had started baking crusty french bread, croissants, and fancy pastries in the mansion's huge kitchen. His dream was to open a bakery and serve fancy deserts and coffee in the large dining room but he needed the town's approval, which would be a real obstacle. The women of the "Upper crust" had started a rumour that Pierre was an international spy hiding in plain sight in our small town. They had seen him taking pictures, writing notes, and drawing in a large sketch pad all over town and they found it very suspicious. The mayor called a town meeting and everyone looked shocked to see Pierre walk in with his sketch pad and pulling a huge plastic container behind him.

"It's a bomb," shrieked Mrs. Bugle of The Upper Crust as she cowered beside her seat. People started to run for the exits but Pierre held up his hands and shouted, "Please, do not be afraid I have merely brought some of my baking for you to sample."

He opened his case to display the cream puffs and fancy cakes and crusty rolls that he had stayed up all night

baking. Once he had their attention, he showed them his vision for the town. The vacant field filled with weeds and burdock was transformed into a beautiful park with a white gazebo, colourful flowers and lush green lawns. The vacant lots near the church were drawn as community gardens filled with row upon row of fresh vegetables and berry bushes. A murmur of awe filled the room followed by Mr. Lester's booming voice yelling: "Too expensive, too much work!!"

"Perhaps we could accomplish this vision with donations and volunteers," Pierre was undeterred. "Do I have any volunteers," he questioned. No one stood up but Mrs. Hicks, who was newly divorced, had taken a fancy to the dashing Pierre. Her son, Mel, who was seated right in front of her, was the captain of the school football team. Mrs. Hicks jabbed him hard in the back with her long pointed fingernail and he leapt to his feet with a startled cry. The rest of the team seeing him stand all stood up as well. Soon the adults were standing, too.

Pierre had his posse of volunteers. Next, he brought out the drawings of his vision for the bakery that he would call Sanctuary and pleaded with the mayor for a business licence.

The mayor and councillors flatly refused saying there was already a cafe in the town but Pierre had one last trick up his sleeve. Once the mayor, who loved his sweets, tasted the fare he readily agreed. Sanctuary became the most popular bakery and tea room in the county and it was always busy.

The "Idea man" as I called him always had more plans for the town. He had some of the local artists paint murals of fields of lupines on the large water tanks beside the road and design a new town sign. He went to the schools with his plans and soon the school children were planting marigolds all down main street. Tourists flocked to the town that became known as the jewel of the coast.

One dark night a black car with tinted windows was seen in the town and the next day Pierre was gone as mysteriously as he had come. For months I looked for him in the faces of strangers everywhere I went but he was not to be found. He had turned the Sanctuary Cafe over to Sebastian's family and for me he left an envelope of cash to cover my education. We had become good friends and he knew of my dream to become a journalist.

Where ever Pierre is, I know he is making the world a better place by lifting others and turning ugliness into beauty.

Now, thinking of Pierre, I know what I must do. Going to the Hardware Store

80 years of Community Building published by Edmonton Social Planning Council

A new retrospective publication highlights Edmonton Social Planning Council's 80 years of contributions towards building a better and more inclusive Edmonton

80 Years of Community Building, a new retrospective publication produced by the Edmonton Social Planning Council (ESPC) to mark their 80th anniversary underscores the enormous contributions the non-profit organization has made towards the history of social development in Edmonton.

The publication gives a comprehensive overview of ESPC's storied history set against the backdrop of the events that shaped Edmonton as a city, spanning the early origins of the organization (which includes an initial effort to form the agency that got stymied by the onslaught of the Great Depression in 1929), its founding in 1940 as the Second World War began, the economic boom linked with the discovery

I buy some white paint and brushes and a rake. I am only home for a short time but I will make Pierre proud and do what I can.

Some teenage girls happen by and one

of oil in Leduc, times of profound social change in the 1960s and 1970s, all the way to the present day.

Through it all, ESPC made invaluable contributions to the fabric of Edmonton's social services sector, helping to fill gaps in services where identified and playing an important role in the formation of several community organizations that continue to positively impact Edmonton and many of its most marginalized populations.

Whether it's Boyle Street Community Services, Christmas Bureau of Edmonton, WIN House, or the Edmonton Community Legal Centre, to name only a few, the Edmonton Social Planning Council has worked tirelessly over the last 80 years helping to build and guide these valued Edmonton institutions," says Susan Morrissey, Executive Director of ESPC. "With the contributions of our founders, we have made indispensable contributions towards building a community in which all people are full and valued participants."

From guiding the coordination of social services to outspoken advocacy to rigorous research in social policy, ESPC has played an integral role in many social issues that have affected our city, which include affordable housing, livable in-

says: "Hey mister, want some help?"

I nod and smile knowing that Pierre's vision will not be lost, it will continue in the hands of the children.

comes, women's shelters, child poverty, integration of newcomers, seniors' services, Indigenous peoples, and many more.

80 Years of Community Building is an invaluable opportunity to take stock of where we are, where we have been, and where we hope to go as an organization as we look towards the next 80 years.

80 Years of Community Building

is available on the ESPC website:

<https://edmontonsocialplanning.ca/2021/01/05/80-years-of-community-building-the-history-of-the-edmonton-social-planning-council/>

Check out our companion timeline here: <https://edmontonsocialplanning.ca/history/>

Phone: (780) 292-2052 (cell)

Novena St. Clare
**Ask St. Clare for three favours,
one business, two impossible.**
**Say nine Hail Marys for nine
days whether you have faith or
not. Pray with candle lit and let
burn to the end on the ninth day
and put this notice in the paper. J.B.**

It is suggested that the following be read the morning of the first Doom Day, Maundy Thursday which is to wit, April 1st, DST, MST.

A Bungle of COVID-19 Police Snitch Hot Line Calls

By Joanne Bengner

1. An unmasked dog came within three feet of me.
 2. I saw a wedding picture of an unmasked man kissing an unmasked woman with whom he had not been sharing a household before their marriage.
 3. We must wear masks in all public places but I saw an unmasked lady drinking coffee in a public parking lot.
 4. I just heard a lady say the c-word in public (COVID)
 5. I saw a politician on TV remove his mask to blow his nose.
 6. My neighbour buys toilet paper every week. Isn't it illegal to buy and hoard and use toilet paper?
 7. The sign said only one person should be in the washroom at a one time but when I entered a man was sitting there. He should be arrested.
 8. This lady is wearing out of style jeans and a sweater with too short sleeves. Oh, sorry – I thought you were the fashion police.
 9. My neighbour was shovelling snow and sweating so bad I just know he has a COVID-19 fever.
 10. A man with a toolbox entered his own house but when I looked the window he was gathering not repairing.
 11. I heard a lady sneeze behind her mask.
 12. My neighbour lives alone and she is only allowed one visitor but I saw a van with red flashing lights and a siren pull up and two strangers entered.
- April Fools!

A Tisket, a Tasket, An Easter Basket

By Joanne Benger

The traditional Easter basket came to America along with the Christmas stocking in the 1700s. The Pennsylvania Dutch children all knew that just as Christ-Kindel would fill their stockings with treasure on Christmas eve, the Oschter Haws would fill their caps with Easter eggs on Easter eve. Just as stockings had to hung with care, the nest for the Oschter Haws must be carefully prepared. First a quiet spot must be found. It could be in the barn, house or shed or even outdoors under a shaded tree if the weather was nice.

Girls used their bonnets and boys used their caps as a base for the nest that the Haws would fill with brightly colored eggs. They decorated them with things on hand – flowers and ribbons, knowing that if the nest was ready and looked nice enough it would be filled with eggs. As time went on baskets replaced bonnets and caps.

When the Easter bunny first came to us on the farm, we found he had laid his jelly bean eggs in birds nests made of hay. Dad had made the nests everywhere all around the hay stack. We missed some of the nests during our Easter egg hunt, so we kept finding eggs until summer.

As a student I remember spending Easter at a friend's house. Their Easter bunny had laid eggs in a motley assortment of containers sitting in a row on the kitchen table. On Easter eve we had ransacked the kitchen cupboards to find them. Anything big enough to hold all the expected eggs would do – a mixing bowl, a strainer, a casserole dish, a basin and even one old basket. The Easter bunny must have liked our containers for on Easter morning we found they were all filled with a collection of wonderful candy Easter eggs that looked remarkably like those in the store plus some hard boiled eggs.

At school we made tiny Easter baskets out of cardboard construction paper and lined them up on the back table on the last day of school before Easter holidays. We went out to play for our last recess and when we came back in the teacher told us the Easter bunny had come. Sure enough, he had. In each basket there was a handful of tiny coloured candy eggs. We spent the rest of the day having an Easter party.

It doesn't seem to matter what an Easter basket is made of or where it is put, the Oschter Haws is sure to find it and fill it with Easter eggs. So, Happy Easter to all and may your Easter basket overflow with eggs.

Some April riddles

By Joanne Benger

- Q. Why is everyone tired on April 1st? A. They have just finished a March of 31 days.
- Q. Why did the man continue to keep lent after Easter was over? A. He was relenting.
- Q. What direction does the wind blow on Easter Sunday? A. Easterly.
- Q. Why can everyone afford an Easter chick? A. They say, 'Cheep, cheep.'
- Q. Why is the hot cross bun cross? A. The other buns got knees (bunnies) and could hop about.
- Q. Why can't the March hare be an Easter rabbit? A. He is nothing but hare (hair).
- Q. Why did the rabbit stop line dancing? A. He lost his hare line (hair-line).
- Q. Why do rabbits have such long ears? A. The better to hear you, my dear.
- Q. If April showers bring May flowers, what do May flowers bring? A. Pilgrims.
- Q. What wallows in mud and brings Easter eggs? A. The Easter piggy.
- Q. What would you get if you crossed an Easter bunny with an over stressed person? A. An Easter basket case.
- Q. Why did the turkey tell jokes all day? A. He wanted to be an Easter ham.
- Q. If one rabbit lays one egg in one day and three rabbits lay three eggs in one day, how long will it take six eggs to lay six rabbits?
A. Forever. Eggs don't lay rabbits.
- Q. Why is a rabbit a good listener? A. He is all ears.
- Q. Why was the Easter rabbit arrested? A. He beat his eggs.
- Q. Why do ladies wear Easter bonnets? A. To tame their hare (hair).
- Q. Why did the little boy switch Easter baskets? A. The grass is always greener in the other basket.
- Q. Why shouldn't you eat Easter eggs before evening? A. They are made of chocolate not chocoearly.

HAIKU by Joanne Benger

Grinning gleesome girl
Happy go lucky biker
Just riding in love

We have been married
for countless years and years and
years of riding bliss

He's dead and buried
He's gone but not forgotten
He's riding the wind

Say Yes to April

By Joanne Bengier

We made it through the winter. Say yes to April. Say yes to spring.

April is all things To all people. It is Decorating Month, Earth Month, Bedtime Story Month, Mental Health Month and Parkinson Awareness Month as well as the month we wear a daffodil to promote Cancer Awareness. Joyful April comes in with Clown Week, a week of fun and laughter when anything goes. Let's hope for a clear sky for "If the first three days of April be foggy, Rain in June will make lanes boggy."

The first day is April Fools Day but only until noon. After dinner, if you're still trying play pranks you will hear, "April Fools is past and you're the greatest fool at last." Never mind. The afternoon is Tailpike Day when you can pin a tail on unsuspecting people and watch the fun of it.

This year April 1 is also Maundy Thursday, the first of the three Doom Days (Tri duum) that end Lent, Give food to the poor and atone for your sins asking forgiveness of anyone you may have harmed even unintentionally.

April 2 is World Autism Day as well as Good Friday. Do a good deed on Good Friday and eat a hot cross bun to protect your house from fire in the coming year.

April 3 is Holy Saturday, the last day of Lent that ends at midnight. If it rains today it will rain for forty days. Good luck for "rain and sun together - April weather."

April 4 is Easter Sunday. Wear something new for good fortune in the coming year and eat an Easter egg for health. Have a wonderful time at Easter followed by a Springtime filled with happiness. Easter cannot be earlier than March 22 or later than April 25 so this is an early Easter. The saying is 'early Easter, early spring.' This year April 4 is also the day Passover ends.

April 7 is World health Day as well as Green Shirt Day for organ donors. Wear your green shirt with pride.

April 10 is Sibling Day as well as National Safety Pin Day.

April 11 – 17, the second week of April is Dental Hygienist Week as well as Smile Week. Look after those teeth for the mask will come off one day.

April 12, 1980, Terry Fox's Marathon of Hope began.

April 12 is also Grilled Cheese Sandwich Day as well as Neighbour Day, the day that never came to be. After the Spanish flu epidemic ended, Seattle celebrated with Neighbour Day on April 12, 1920. It was to be a yearly even but with the flu over and forgotten, there was no need to repeat it.

April 12 at sunset Ramadan begins. It is the ninth month of the Mohammedan year, the Muslim Lent or holy month. It will last until May 12.

April 14 is Baisakhi, In 1669 Guru Gobind Singh baptized his first disciples on the date. The ceremony known as Amrit is a time of baptism.

April 17 is National Haiku Day. It is an unrhymed Japanese poem consisting of 17 symbol sounds. Westerners write it as a three line poem. I write this haiku... Counting the syllables twice....It's five, seven, five.

April 18 is Librarian Day as well as Wear Your Pyjamas to Work Day and National Hanging Out Clothes Day for those who prefer a clothes line.

April 20 is the first day of the year we can expect to see a temperature of 20 degrees.

April 21, 1926 Queen Elizabeth was born. Happy birthday, Your Highness. I'm glad you and Prince Phillip got the vaccine.

April 22 is Earth Day. We must reduce our carbon footprint and create less waste among other things.

April 23 is Shakespeare's birthday. He wrote, 'Brevity is the soul of wit' and 'Neither a borrower nor a lender be.' In 1995 this was chosen by UNESCO as World Book and Copyright Day, a day to fight illiteracy.

April 23 is also St. George's Day. Wear a red rose in honour of the dragon-slayer.

April 23 is Denim Day as well as Noise Awareness Day and Soda Fountain Day.

April 26 John James Audubon was born. Enjoy the birds.

April 28, 2020 Fort McMurray had a flood evacuation. We realized that disasters do occur during a pandemic.

April 30 is National Oatmeal Cookie Day and Honesty Day in the U.S. but even better it is April Fools Day because the Latvians Celebrate April Fools Day twice, once at the beginning of the month and once at the end of the month.

Husband dressed in black

My true love, my friend, my man

My riding partner

Ride forever free

Making thunder in the sky

Dead biker riding

Examining the state of US democracy

By Jessica Pollard,
St. Roots, Portland, Oregon

Recent events in the US have shaken its democracy to its very core. Former president Trump railed against the legitimate election result and challenged the ratification process in a number of states, and a large group of his supporters stormed the Capitol on 6 January. It left many of us wondering about the state of democracy in the US. For Camila Vergara, US democracy is on unstable ground.

Camila Vergara is a postdoctoral research scholar at the Eric H. Holder Jr. Initiative for Civil and Political Rights at Columbia Law School. Vergara spoke to Street Roots about the inequities of the US system of government on the eve of President Joe Biden's inauguration from a farmhouse in Los Ríos, Chile, where she grew up under the Augusto Pinochet regime in the late 20th century.

Vergara researched constitutional processes in the U.S. while undertaking a Fulbright scholarship, and she delved deep into political theory while examining the democratic processes of pink-tide countries such as Ecuador, Bolivia, and Venezuela. She was interested in what worked and what didn't work when it came to crafting a governmental system with direct representation.

Vergara came to understand that the path to true democracy lies in the gump-tion of bite-sized local assemblies who have real decision-making power that can be used to keep elected officials in check. Today, she's advising local groups in Chile as the country undergoes a new constitutional process following a national plebiscite that drew overwhelming approval from voters.

Vergara discussed all this, along with her latest book, *Systemic Corruption: Constitutional Ideas for an Anti-Oligarchic Republic* at a virtual event, "Dis-mantling Fake Democracy. Creating Real Democracy", on 3 February. The event was hosted by the Oregon Community Rights Network, which works to educate the public about "the many systemic barriers to local democracy and decision-making,"

according to state coordinator of the network, Nancy Ward. We caught up with her a few days afterwards to dive deeper into the issues that are facing America as it moves into the Biden era.

Jessica Pollard: Many democracies progress down the road towards becoming oligarchies. How far down the path was the United States before 2016 and where does it fall now, in your eyes?

Camila Vergara: The first democracy in the world, as we understand it according to the analysis taught now, is the United States. However, if you go into the actual discussion of the Federal Convention, democracy was a dirty word. [James] Madison [one of the Founding Fathers] was very explicit about this. He said, "This is not a democracy; this is a republic." And this means a government in which representation takes place. It's not real democracy, as in the ancient form of democracy in which the people themselves were involved. [The working] classes were paid to go to the assembly and could put their name forward to be in committees and make decisions.

It's only in the 19th century, and at the beginning of the 20th, that democracy became a good word. It's kind of like a co-optation of this label that really never materialized. And why has it never materialized? Because, supposedly, the states were too large to allow for the people themselves to be engaged in decision making. The representatives would unburden their regular citizens from running things and making decisions. So it was like a win-win situation. But it really wasn't in the sense that it was also crafted as a way to — and this is made explicit — to keep the people away from power.

But there was a period of time where there was more equality and the state was more present, and an equalizer in a way — [this was] during the FDR era. The same as in Europe. Thomas Piketty, the French historian [who wrote] *Capital in the 21st Century*, says, basically, that the odd period was the after-war period, from the 1940s to the 1970s. And that's a moment that we think of as normal because it's our generation or the generation of our parents. It was not.

Piketty says that today we are at that level of inequality that was present in the 1920s and similar to the unchallenged regime in France before the revolution. It's

not one guy that is corrupt. It's not a party that is corrupt. It's the system, and how it works. This process of slow the oligarchization of power? It's more and more like a path dependency.

The Obama years were no FDR years, you know. The level of inequality has just been growing steadily, and with no limits. Trump was just a manifestation of this, and it had much to do with the disaffection that [impacts on] the welfare of the white working class. In the 1950s, a Trump figure would not be viable because the people would be more secure in their financial stability.

What we have entered now is a time that others have called "precarity capitalism". If you're fired from your job and you live paycheck to paycheck, even if you are in a management position, you have a status and you lose that; you're in debt. Even if it doesn't happen, it is a very threatening thought that would spark you into fighting for your own things against others. So that kind of helped Trump to be in a position of power. But he's just one manifestation within this progressive inequality process.

Question: Do you think that the Biden administration in the U.S. will halt that progression, or do you think his administration is going to further it?

Further it. The policies that would put a stop to, or at least kind of ameliorate, the situation would be, for example, a wealth tax. I don't see the Biden administration going for a wealth tax. All the things [that will stay in place] come from previous administrations. They're putting makeup on it and trying to make it fit. [Such as] the idea that universal health care is something that [Biden] is not in favor of. He's reproducing the insurance system, which is private. When Obama was elected, he campaigned for a public option, and he didn't do it. He wanted it to all be bipartisan, and, in the end, it was the worst of both worlds.

The insurance companies had 40 million captive clients, basically. And there was no control of prices, and no public option. The insurance [companies], they don't compete, and they just basically profit. Whatever Biden does is going to keep reproducing the same system. And the thing with systemic corruption is that it just keeps going. It is how the system works. It's just that you enact a law, and the law reproduces itself. So the worst

the law reproduces itself. So the worst offenders, if you will, are the ones who are negligent, that don't do anything. So I don't see a way that he's going to put a stop to the oligarchization process.

How can people reclaim power from the ruling elites in a place like the U.S.?

I think it can be done. We are in crisis, and there is a desire for solutions. People, I think, voted for Biden as a lesser evil. There's a lot of people who are disaffected. There's The Movement for a People's Party going on. There is the Democratic Socialists of America movement, which could be[come] a party. And then you have the fringe neo-Nazi fascist whatever from the Republican Party that could also become a new force. Everything is in play today.

I think it is possible for people to reclaim power. And I think that it could be done at the local level. Of course, we need to test it out. We cannot do something at the national federal level. So we either have a very engaged community that could do this, and we say: "OK, we're going to have local assemblies in every neighborhood, and we're going to start making decisions, and we're going to aggregate them. And the moment that we have a majority, we're going to push it to our mayor, or whoever is in charge."

When you have the majority of people assembled making decisions, that is uncontestable. It's not that you elected someone who could be manipulated or self-serving or serving an ideology. No, this is not a party thing. I think people should have their own judgment based on their lived experience at the local level. There is a wisdom there that the elites in Washington do not have. I think we need to start valuing our own popular wisdom coming from below and start organizing for a political organ.

This is the first kind of step in giving power [and] reclaiming power. It has to be from below and from the top, at some point, in a way, to legalize it. But I think that people do not have to ask permission from anyone to start assembling and making decisions. And that is very powerful. And, of course, you also have the media to help you out. Local media can promote and give visibility to people power.

Portland made a lot of headlines this summer for the protests surrounding the Black Lives Matter uprising. And out of that, in our city, we've seen an increase

in grassroots organizing, like mutual aid networks, and also things like eviction defense. Do you see this kind of organizing gaining traction through the Black Lives Matter movement as a step towards establishing that localized kind of power?

"Crisis" means two things in Greek: breaking, and also an opportunity. There is a breaking up, and a way out. So when you are in a crisis in terms of racial inequality and police brutality, you have people reacting that were dormant before.

These community centers that are everywhere in neighborhoods, like senior centers, we need to reclaim them, occupy them in a political manner for people to meet, and have a routine of [engaging with] politics. And you need to harness the energy that was created in an extraordinary crisis moment and bring it back to the base in order to organize something that is permanent. So I think there is a great opportunity, because we are in crisis.

In Chile, these political and social organizations overlap, because the people that are participating are producing many things. They tell me we need to have a mutual aid kitchen or a common kitchen, a soup kitchen, in the same place as the local council. Because people need to eat while they're discussing politics. So everything has to be kind of in the same ecosystem, in a way.

Where do you see tech companies like Twitter, which recently banned former President Donald Trump from the platform, fitting in with this?

The United States is the only country in the world in which free speech is absolute. There are no limits, federally at least. In every country in the world, there are federal laws for hate speech. The supremacist groups are banned. All the IP addresses of the supremacist groups in Germany, for example, are in the U.S. So the U.S. is the hub that allows for all this hate speech to go around. And these corporations, Facebook and Twitter, have their own rules of engagement. They decide who should talk and who shouldn't.

People are very happy because Trump was banned, but this is giving fuel to the other side, which is saying that the tech companies are these feudal lords making decisions that have more authority than the U.S. government. They're right. Even if they're doing the correct thing by banning someone who is inciting violence, they are doing it in a private manner, which is equivalent to censorship within

that sphere, which is not really a private sphere. [Twitter] is open to everybody, so it should be public.

Various news outlets describe the right-wing extremist attack on the U.S. Capitol as a strike or attack on democracy. Is that how you would describe the events that took place? And what long-term impact do you think the attack will have on the U.S. government?

I think that it should be described as an attempted "self-coup". It's actually the supporters of Trump going and doing whatever he said that they should be doing. If you're saying that this [election] was a fraud and you're there to support the system, then you're a patriot, not a traitor. And the problem with patriots and traitors is that it depends on who's talking and from which perspective. So this representative government and the authority that is generated through the institutions and procedures of the election, and the passing from one government to the other, all these kinds of rituals are being shattered, I would say, almost permanently. It's very similar to what happened with Obama, with the birther movement. We need to remember that Trump originated the birther movement. So many people, it was a fringe of them, thought that Obama was not the president, and this sentiment lingered. Now it has grown into skepticism about the system as a whole.

You need something really different that could not bring people together, per se, but give reassurance somehow that the system can work really well. How can you convince people who think that the machines are being manipulated with an algorithm that they will not be manipulated in the future? You never know. This kind of doubt in the system has never been [present] before. And I think this is very difficult to repair.

I think it could be repaired with popular power. Because the people that are Trump supporters could be in a neighborhood assembly and say, "OK, we're participating; we have power here." Even if they're going to be a fringe. They will be a fringe because they are a lot of people together, but neighborhoods are heterogeneous in a way. If you participate, and you know that you're not being blocked from participation at the local level, you think that the system is more legitimate than if you only vote every four years.

Details left out of my \$20 ONE WAY idea

By John Zapantis

When I first conceived this great idea for a one of a kind innovative flag cab company that would be distinct from rival taxi services, little did I know what important details had been left out of the process, while thinking at that time that I had earned my place in the ranks of that public transportation industry.

Firstly, when this great idea came to mind I was thinking of a name for a company that would describe the half price rate that I'd charge my clients while driving them one way to the Edmonton International Airport from Edmonton.

The first name that immediately came to mind was how much I'd charge at a half price rate to deliver my clients to the airport, knowing from my prior experiences while riding in a cab from Edmonton to the Edmonton International Airport, that it would normally come out to \$40.00 dollars on a one way trip.

That's when a fitting name materialized in my head. A one way trip at half that cost encouraged the creative thought process of naming my flag cab company \$20 ONE WAY.

I knew that I'd have to offer more incentives to my riders that no other cab company rival could offer because of the sometimes dangerous situations that cabbies sometimes face, such as unruly passengers and would be thieves, who have had a notable history for robbing cabbies. I came up with a safety measure that I intend on implementing to assure me of my safety. I am planning on hiring a security ride along who'll not only ensure me of my safety while behind the drivers wheel, but ensure that passengers in the back, while riding in my cab, will have to conduct themselves accordingly, when there is the obvious presence of a security ride along watching over us and ensuring us all of our safety.

The other innovative idea that other cab companies do not offer is when there's an accident on the Queen E 2 Hi-way that cabs are known for driving their clients to the Edmonton International Airport, sometimes car accidents on that hi-way have been known to create traffic jams, causing passengers who are riding those cabs, to miss their flights at the Edmonton International Airport.

My solution to a problem of that nature occurring would be to get my passenger to sign a card stipulating that if they miss their flight at the airport, while caught in a similar situation they can then phone me the next time and ride

for free, while travelling to their next planned flight from the airport.

In the Alberta Street News January/February 2021 issue I was all gung ho in telling the readers about this innovative one of a kind flag cab company \$20 ONE WAY and breaking the news, about my companies three incentives for riding and a photo of myself in which I could be seen proudly holding up a \$20 ONE WAY logo that I also created and designed for my one man taxi company.

But all great minds that often process ideas as quick as lightening can hit a tree. When that incredible light bulb in our heads has been known to go on, we can inevitable miss out on some important details that may push us back somewhat and that factor alone may not be too encouraging, when that grim reality starts to settle in.

That's what I finally realized when I drove over to the West-End Registries offices in Edmonton, to apply for my class 4 license to drive cab. While inquiring at the front desk about writing for my class 4 cab license I was told by a helpful lady that I'd have to go online from my computer at home and write for my class 4 taxi license. She handed me an instructional brochure that would give me instructions on what link to type into my computer so that I could study for my class 4 taxi license.

When I got home later and did what the lady suggested, I also noticed that before I was to write for my class 4 taxi license, I'd first have to participate in a road test and pass that.

When I made an effort to look up the guide lines for writing for my class 4 taxi license, while typing in the link to open up my study guide to prepare me to write for my class 4, I noticed that the link wouldn't open on my computer, causing me a great deal of stress along the way, while repeating the same steps over and over again, but despite my tolerance in this difficult situation, the link wouldn't

open up on the West-End Registries data base.

So I'll be going down to West-End Registries to tell them about the issue I'm having while trying to open up their link to study the guidelines in preparing to write for a future class 4 test.

Also to add to the disappointment of it all, there were more hoops to jump in my efforts to get this great idea off the ground. I was told by a few of my friends that my car insurance history doesn't look too impressive, considering I've had a number of car accidents with my previous two vehicles, prior to having my last car replaced by a newer car and written off because of my last car accident.

A lady friend of mine confirmed to me that my commercial insurance to drive cab may double, after telling her that I pay a premium of over \$3,800 a year for full coverage auto insurance.

So I'm really not looking forwards to hearing how much the total may come out to at double the cost if that really applies after all.

I will persistently do my best to get that premium down, hopefully by more than half the cost by getting three estimates from three different insurance companies, before I even think of starting this innovative idea of mine.

There's some homework ahead of this exciting business venture of mine and I'm not about to let some glitches on the West-End Registries website kill my dream of succeeding with this unique idea of mine, but will work persistently hard in getting this all sorted out, so that I may succeed in my plans for offering a one of a kind taxi service to future riders, who'll benefit in more ways than one, when one day riding in my taxi, called \$20 ONE WAY!

John Zapantis proudly displays the \$20 ONE WAY logo he created and designed for his future taxi service.
Photo by Linda Dumont



Try a little kindness

By Allan Sheppard

**And if you try a little kindness
Then you'll overlook the blindness
Of narrow-minded people on the
narrow-minded streets**

(Try a Little Kindness, written by Curt Sapaugh and Bobby Austin, recorded by Glen Campbell)

A recent post to my Facebook news feed caught my attention and respectful admiration. Originally posted by Ehab Taha and shared by Jan Darwin Hutchins, both strangers to me (Facebook's algorithms work in mysterious, occasionally serendipitous ways), the post read: "I saw the most incredible display of humanity on the sky train. A six-foot five man suffering from drug abuse and/or mental health issues was being very aggressive on the bus with erratic movements, cursing, shouting, etc. While everyone was scared, this one seventy-year-old woman reached out her hand, tightly gripping his hand until he calmed down, sat down silently, with eventual tears in his eyes. I spoke to the woman after this incident and she simply said, 'I'm a mother and he needed someone to touch.'" And she started to cry. Don't fear or judge the stranger on the bus: life does not provide equal welfare for all its residents."

The post included a photograph showing a shaved-headed man, sitting on a backpack in front of the train doors, his hand held by an older woman, who looks intently at him while he looks down and away from her. The photo tells the story given in the text, but it also suggests other narratives that, though not so clear, may be just as important.

Knowing that many of my Facebook friends would appreciate the anecdote, I shared the post to my timeline and moved on.

A week or so later, I went to the downtown library to return some books. It was early in the morning. The streets were empty, due to Covid. As I waited for a walk light, a young woman, I assume in her mid-twenties, approached the library from a different direction and arrived at the building a few steps ahead of me. As she walked, she shouted words I could not understand, though it was clear she was in mental distress. When I was a few yards away from her, she ripped a mask from her face and took off her backpack,

tossing it aside, still shouting and waving her arms.

Did I reach out to help? Did I follow the example of the woman on the Sky Train that I and my Facebook friends so admired? I'm afraid (and ashamed) not, although, unlike the woman in the anecdote, I have not lived a life that taught me how to react in such situations. I did not know what I could or should have done, then or now. I am a good listener, but not so good at reaching out. Afraid of getting involved; of getting trapped; of making things worse. Not sure how to make them better.

I kept my distance passing the woman, took my books to the return chute, and stayed carefully distant as I returned to other errands. She was still shouting and waving as I entered my bank, across the street, then moved on.

What's my point in sharing this? I'm not sure I have one, except to admire even more what this woman did so calmly and casually; to admit my own failure, given an opportunity, to follow her simple example that I admired in theory, but could not emulate in practice; to hope that I will do better, should I encounter someone in distress again.

It's easy to admire the wisdom and compassion--the simple but profound humanity--that this woman modeled so naturally in reaching out to a man in distress. It is much, much harder to follow her example.

Life is complicated. Perhaps we just make it so. Because simply human is a scary thing to (have to) be.

Should I have called 911 to send someone qualified to support people in mental distress? That is also problematic, given the way police often respond, especially with members of marginalized minorities. That was not the case in my encounter at the library, but it might have been a factor in another incident that occurred in the same area during a recent spell of freezing weather.

Late in the evening of 14 February, with a temperature at street level of -33 degrees, members of The Bear Clan Patrol Edmonton Beaver Hills House were serving soup and sandwiches to a group of homeless citizens who had taken shelter in the concourse of Edmonton's underground Central LRT station. Police arrived and, invoking city bylaws and provincial Covid-19 regulations, forced everyone to leave the station because they were loitering, littering and, in any case, not allowed

to remove their facemasks indoors to eat. Bear Clan Patrol members pleaded in vain for flexibility due to the extreme cold. Officers said shelters were available for those who needed them and it was their choice whether they wanted to go there or to stay on the streets. They did not recognize or consider reasons why marginalized people in various kinds of distress might not want or be able to use a shelter (during a pandemic) and they made no effort to provide or call for transportation for anyone who, if they had chosen to go to a shelter, would have had to walk a mile or more in bitter weather.

I won't add to the condemnation already heaped on the officers involved or the tone-deaf public relations response of the Edmonton Police Service (EPS). I will instead point to an issue raised by this and similar instances of the law being casually and indiscriminately weaponized against vulnerable citizens without regard to circumstances or conditions.

Many of us want to believe that, individually and as communities, we would be better off and more secure if the rule of law were always to prevail, in preference to the rule of persons. Incidents such as this point to a serious flaw in that belief: There are times, many times in fact, when enforcing the letter of the law is far more unjust than acting with discretion outside it.

The officers involved and the EPS can claim to have done the righteous thing by enforcing the law—without fear or favour, as the saying goes. They would be right. But can they claim to have done the right thing, the humane thing: the thing that a simple, but wise, seventy-year-old mother would have found a way to do instinctively? I think not.

What the police did (and did not do) might have been legal. It might have been justified, even required, according to law. But it was not right. It was not just. It was not moral or ethical.

I cannot believe that, in their hearts, the officers involved and the police service that employs, trains, and oversees them, do not know how profoundly wrong they were.

They can and must learn to do better. So must we all. Above all, we must not give up hope: "Don't slip on the banana peel of nihilism, even while listening to the roar of Nothingness."

Lawrence Ferlinghetti (March 24, 1919 – February 22, 2021)

14th Annual Deep Freeze: A Byzantine Winter Fete re-invented for 2021

By John Zapanis

The 14th Annual Deep Freeze: A Byzantine Winter Fete, was forced by the unavoidable circumstances of the COVID-19 virus to take on a virtual reinvented facelift. The notable pandemic has inevitably spread its deadly reach throughout all regions of the world, causing millions of deaths worldwide and plunging nations around the world into economic chaos.

Because of the mitigating factors created by the deadly pathogen's detrimental threat to the safety of the public, society's most charitable out door fund raising events were cancelled in 2020. The havoc that this killer disease has left in its wake for Deep Freeze that went virtual, has been a blessing in disguise!

The 10 day Deep Freeze event was presented by Arts on the Ave. from February 5th to 14th at Borden Park and seven other community league halls in Edmonton including the Parkdale/Cromdale Community League, Eastwood Community League, Alberta Avenue Community League, Elmwood Park Community League, Delton Community League, Westwood Community League and Spruce Avenue Community League.

This year's event took a little of a different approach, when it came to creating its own version of social distancing measures in safeguarding the wellbeing and health of its many visitors, including story tellers, ice carvers, artisans, and fiddlers, who were all absent from the venue. Despite their absence in safeguarding themselves and visitors from COVID-19, their various works installed at eight locations told the stories of their talented diverse works.

This event's theme this year was Fiddle and Fables, an eclectic mix of pre-recorded fiddle tunes recorded by Franco Canadian fiddlers, accompanied by fables and stories interpreted from storyboards on site for

the benefit of its festival goers viewing convenience.

Other activities that were offered included The Deep Freeze Virtual Atelier (workshops) that were viewed on The Deep Freeze online website, varying from The History of Finger Weaving to an endless list of fun activities for everyone of all ages.

The Fiddle and Skate, a free public skate, was offered to visitors at three community leagues, where the skaters were treated to a back drop of pre-recorded Franco Canadian fiddle music, that could be heard through the PA systems hooked up at the skating rinks, encouraging an entertaining atmosphere for much more motivated skating.

This unique event also celebrated the cultural and artistic diversity of many cultures that included Ukrainian, Metis, French Canadian, Franco African, Inuit and Indigenous cultures that have a strong social and artistic connection with the Arts on the Ave Community.

Ice carver Barry Collier took some time out to do a (social distance) phone interview with ASN. Collier, along with other artisans in the event, was not present at the event, because of COVID-19 restrictions enforced by its presenter Arts on the Ave.

Collier is not an unfamiliar face in the ice carving communities. He's been carving since 1990 and first participated in the Deep Freeze event in 2009. His earlier development as a natural artist originally made its humble beginnings when his mother sent him to art school at the Edmonton Art Gallery, when he was only five years old.

He took those classes from 1968 to 1971. The classes encouraged him to think outside of the box, where he started to realize that was the direction to take and helping him to discover his hidden and creative artistic potential.

Even though it was so long ago that he hardly remembers a thing about the fundamentals he was taught in developing the tools of the trade, he remembers he had a natural ability to draw while applying his creative thinking. The course really helped him develop self-confidence.

Collier said, "Like I said, I already had that skill with me. That just brings it to the surface."

Despite his early roots as a student of art, it wasn't until years later, while working as a district manager at a packaged ice company called The Ice Pedlar back in

1990 that Barry decided to make a serious effort at ice carving. The ice company supplied packaged ice to various retail grocery stores that included, Sobeys, Safeways and 7-Elevens in Edmonton.

Collier elaborates further about the circumstances that got him into the art form. He said, "When you go back to 1990, there weren't a whole lot of festivals that involved ice sculpting, but when I looked back, then it was more of myself. I just wanted to do something a little bit different and the gentleman that was doing the ice contracts on the side for us, took a teaching job in Red Deer. So he left his tools behind. He actually worked with the Edmonton Inn at that time, but he was kind of contracted at that time to do ice carvings on the side for us and he went to get a teaching job at Red Deer College and left his tools behind. At that point, I decided to dive in and I never looked back. Ever since I've enjoyed doing it. I like the idea of working with ice as a medium. I enjoy working in the cold. It just seems to be different than what anyone else can do."

He also remembers his ice company's priorities in also taking on exciting projects, while tackling challenging ice carving assignments for hotel buffets that really made him commit to the trade, Collier said, "The company at the time was actually called The Ice Pedlar. We actually did ice carvings for a lot of hotels at that time at the Coast Terrace Inn. The carvings were for hotel buffets. The carvings varied from salmon to angel fish, to eagles."

The fascination in just watching his mentor at work carving blocks of ice and shaping them to creative form really encouraged his interests in working persistently at creating works of art through these ice carvings, Collier said, "I'd sit back and talk to him in the evenings, when he was carving. Just seeing what he did do, I found it very interesting. Now, as time had passed, he had a different style and even the gentleman I worked with had different styles as well."

The road to carving has been a long one. Today Collier works with a team of two other ice carvers named Kelly Davies and Stephen Chung, while showcasing their various accomplished ice carvings at the Deep Freeze Festival's eight locations, Collier said, "I find that with a little group of three sculptors that we have right now, we kind of feed off each other, you know with ideas, we learn to adapt and use our innovations on each project that are

individually different.”

When he first participated at this festival back in 2009 his first carving was a towering eight foot tall dragon. His persistence to work at shaping that dragon took him a day and a half to complete.

Then in 2010, he entered his first ice carving competition at the Deep Freeze and beat out eight carvers for his accomplished carving of a Tyrannosaurus Rex dinosaur.

Despite the excitement of winning the competition, he claims it was more about the presence of the audience support that motivated his drive, than the thought of winning.

Collier said, “I really got into the joy of doing the carvings in front of the people. That’s where the joy really started, because before that, a lot of the carvings that I had created were done in a freezer and packaged up. I’d take it to a wedding corporate function, put it together, set it up before people would see it. It was already there. Now that it’s a competition, I was able to do the ice carving in front of people, reach out and talk to them. They wanted to take pictures. Have them take pictures with me, two people in front of my carvings. I really enjoyed the interaction with

the public.”

More than anything, Collier finds his gift to carve a relaxing outlet, especially when he can share his talented art form with members in his community.

Collier said, “It’s a joy. It is kind of like an outlet, where I feel like it’s self-meditating. It really typifies enduring what has been created for them in this neighbourhood, just the journey that we have this little gift, which is especially just for you. Just take the time and enjoy it”

One of the many ice carving that Collier and his team have on display at one of eight locations is called The Lion and the Hedge Hog, interpreted from a story board that tells the fable. The carving was completed by Barry Collier, Kelly Davies and Stephen Chung and was showcased in front of the Eastwood Community League Hall.

This year’s event brought in that uninvited reminder that COVID-19 might have been hiding around, but that never stopped festival goers from letting a bully’s reputation stop them from seeing their heroes works of art create the fun that visitors needed to experience while overcoming their fears and leaving their worries behind.

The event was a test for tolerance, because of COVID-19 accompanied by its ‘Partner in Crime - Deep Freeze Old Man Winter’ and the minus 20 cold factor that converged over the festivals eight locations. But that never stopped festival goers from courageously coming down in challenging COVID-19 by cautiously social distancing and dressing in their winter armour to view the panoramic works of art and claim the festival as their own!

That was all possible thanks to the many selfless efforts of the events many volunteers, local sponsors, donors who donated to support the artisans and the Arts on the Ave staff, Arts on the Ave Founder and Executive Director Christy Morin, Program Manager Sauve MacBean and Bottom line Production Ambassador of Buzz Kate Hamblin.

They have all helped to give these thriving and very talented artisans a place to call home and curious art goers a door that will always be open to them and God willing when COVID’s gone, . . the artisans will be back again!

**Below: Ice carver Barry Collier. at work creating an ice sculpture.
Photo by Epic Photography.**



Loss

Loss upon loss upon loss
There's an excavation where my
heart should be
I am cast beyond the epicentre of my
existence,
Future fixed, doing what must be done
Still standing, unyielding
How can I create a future
Upon the desolation of all that's gone?

I am left, bereft,
Reaching out empty arms into the past
Remembering love lost, death,
Destruction, chaos and more death.

I am left, bereft
As blackness invades my soul
A silent witness of unwept woe.
I struggle not to yield to grief
Lest I never emerge from that
wellspring of tears.
If I start crying I may never stop.

By Linda Dumont

I Stand

Silent years gone by
Memories float through my mind.
Of all the times long since past
All the friend's never to be seen again.
All the dreams, now dead.
I wonder at the complexity of it all.
What could have been, shall never be awakened,
And that which will, I know not how to reach.
I can feel myself stirring
Awakening once more.
Piece by piece my shell comes off.
I can feel, though only slightly now
The rich warm light of sun.
I am beginning to see that I can be me,
With all my quirks and talents
With the war of light and darkness which wages
inside
The rage, and serenity
The joy, and great sorrow
And be accepted.
I stand here
In this delicate state in time
And slowly hold my heart out.

My church

I sit alone in amongst the tree's
The gentle breeze caressing my cheeks, my hair,
my back
I close my eyes in raptured delight.
This feels so right.
The leaves swish melodically with the wind.
A moan of pleasure escapes my lips
I can feel all the pain, and hate filter out of me,
Leaving only peace.
This is my church.
This is where I cleanse my soul.
Not in the heavy brick wall's with the smell of
sickeningly strong incense, and the
Sense of death in the air.
With the people that claim to love,
While they stab each other in the back.
Murder in their thoughts and death on their hearts.
But here where the birds sing their love to the
Father
And the leaves clap their hands with joy.
Here and here alone is where my heart thrives
with life.
I am alive once more.

By Angelique Branston