

THE UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA ALUMNI MAGAZINE

SPRING 2024

# UVIC TORCH

# RAMOS

Jump into The Performance Issue with UVic Theatre grad and comedy sensation Laura Ramos, who is selling out shows around the world.



ON CAMPUS







## Run in the Sun

Student athlete **KALLALEI RYDEN** from the UVic Vikes women's cross country and track team takes practice in stride at sunny Centennial Stadium.

Credit: [APShutter.com](https://www.aphutter.com)



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# Swimming Lessons

UVic Psychology grad and Olympian **Ryan Cochrane** reflects on his years as a high-performance athlete—and how it helped him navigate a real estate career.

BY JENNY MANZER, BA '97



**R**yan Cochrane knows what it's like to feel the heft of an Olympic medal placed around his neck—more than once. He held Canadian records in three swimming events. So, it is surprising to hear him say he was once just a middle-of-the-pack athlete. He credits competition with his brother for lighting a spark.

"I was a very mediocre athlete growing up. Being a twin, I really learned that competitive nature at a young age. It was not something I was born with. It was something that I learned due to my experience as a twin," he says. "Those lessons taught me how to be persistent in my goals and how to not want just immediate gratification—to know that some goals are years in the making."

Having reached the heights of success as an Olympic medalist, Cochrane, who earned a degree

in psychology from UVic in 2014, chose to throw his passion into real estate. He applied many of the goal-setting practices learned in sport to his new career as an agent.

"A lot of people don't know what their weekly goals or monthly goals are, let alone their yearly or life goals, so I think having a partner or someone to keep you accountable is super important. And keeping excitement around what those goals are."

Cochrane keeps weekly, monthly and yearly goals to see if he's met his aspirations. "Knowing how to measure yourself at any given time, you're not going to hit every goal, you're not going to be successful every time, but I think it's important to have direction to what you do and purpose at the same time."

There's nothing magical about athletes that leads to success, he says, except perhaps their work ethic. Over time, you work up to training 25 or 30 hours a week—and step by step that mediocre athlete can become a world champion.

It has been an interesting transition from sport and its 4 a.m. wake-up calls, he says. Now that he can widen his world to more than swimming, he enjoys connecting with family and friends and was also a volunteer on the UVic Alumni Association board for many years as a way to give back. "I knew when I went to UVic my commitment was to sport. At the same time, there's a life that happens after it. When I was going to university, sport was first, school was second. That was a very conscious decision."

He chose real estate in part because it is always changing and interesting—and while it's often stressful, he enjoys helping people during such an important time in their lives. He says the learnings from high-performance sport and his psychology degree have helped him to stay optimistic and positive—a good trait in his business.

"I believe everything is fixable. There's an answer to everything and you just have to really put your head down and work and be proactive. All those skills really transfer. They all take a bit of different importance when you get to a new career."

And what about his hair? Has it recovered after all the years of chlorine from the pool? "It has," he says with a laugh. ¶

## TORCH



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# A Path to Peak Performance

Bringing together diverse perspectives, expertise and experiences, we are able to address complex challenges.

BY KEVIN HALL, PHD, PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR



## PEAK PERFORMANCE FOR UNIVERSITIES

In the middle of March I was visited by the Order of Pi, a group of Engineering students who, since the 1990s, have been raising money for charity by pie-ing students and university leaders. While the pie itself may not have been delicious, the performance and pageantry certainly was! That they have been taking it so seriously for over 30 years said a lot to me about the kind of community we have at UVic.

When thinking about how a university performs, we often follow a litany of traditional metrics like rankings from credible sources, awards, grants, patents, fellowships, reputation for teaching, or varsity standings. While these are relevant to some of us, I'd argue that we should look more holistically at how we work together, how we build community and what impact we can make on the world around us.

A university is a complex ecosystem that aspires to support everyone to perform at their best. This interconnected performance at every level generates ripples that build into giant waves of impact. As UVic alumni, you were part of this process, and still are.

## PEOPLE, PLACE AND THE PLANET

When we developed our strategic plan, *Distinctly UVic*, we knew that one of the biggest priorities would be the health and well-being of our people, our community and the planet. The Ləkʷəŋən and SENĆOŦEN teaching of this priority, Sʔełtenxʷ | S,ÁEŁA'NW or "when things are in harmony," succinctly reinforces that all life, all functions at UVic, are interconnected. The success of this institution, and the strength of the communities to which UVic belongs, rely on the collaboration of all its moving pieces.

We commit to upholding a thriving community where every individual is valued, supported and

empowered to reach great potential because we know that purpose and fulfillment are foundational to the fullest expression of human well-being.

## COLLABORATION, COURAGE AND CELEBRATION

When I pick up a copy of the *Torch* or attend events like the Distinguished Alumni Awards, I am inspired by the achievements in our community. Their stories of success become a part of our own.

What propels UVic to be a higher performance university is how we prioritize coming together to deliver quality programming, services and student experience. Just read the stories in this issue to get a sense of the amazing work being done by UVic alumni. By bringing together diverse perspectives, expertise and experiences, we are able to address complex challenges, drive innovation and create lasting impact through collective effort. It takes courage to push the boundaries of knowledge, to challenge conventional wisdom, to do things differently and to embrace new ideas and approaches.

Certain aspects of performance that are rarely given attention include trial and error, acting on the creative or radical options and failing forward. When our efforts result in a less than positive outcome, so long as we've done our very best and put in the work, we will continue on with integrity and accountability to find value in the process. The path of a top-performing athlete is paved with loss, but that is part of the journey. See the feature on Olympic physiologist and double alumnus Ben Sporer in this issue for expert advice on this topic. It takes courage to separate your failure from your self-worth and see that process as a part of the path to success—or even Olympic gold.

When we do achieve success, we are eager to celebrate it. We recognize and are inspired by the richness of the journey to success and making a difference. Because at UVic we do good work, and it empowers us knowing that we are walking the path of peak performance together. †

"Certain aspects of performance that are rarely given attention include trial and error, acting on the creative or radical options and failing forward."



# Supporting Tse'k'wa

UVic alumna **Alyssa Currie, MA '19**, leads operations of Tse'k'wa, an accessible cultural-heritage site in northern BC and one of Canada's oldest known archeological sites.

BY KATY DECOSTE, MA '22

Surrounded by the boreal forest of northern British Columbia, on the territory of the Dane-zaa First Nations, a sandstone cave is embedded in bedrock. Perched on a steep cliff, the site overlooks the Peace River Valley, the traditional territory of the Dane-zaa.

Since time immemorial, the site, known as Tse'k'wa—which means “Rock House” in Dane-zaa *Záágé?*—has been a gathering place for the Dane-zaa people to meet, share and celebrate. It's also one of the oldest known archaeological sites in Canada. In 2012, recognizing the cultural and archaeological importance of Tse'k'wa, three Dane-zaa First Nations—the Doig River, Prophet River and West Moberly First Nations—formed the Tse'k'wa Heritage Society, which has stewarded the site through a transformation into an accessible cultural heritage site.

Today, working closely with the Tse'k'wa Board of Directors, Executive Director Alyssa Currie, MA '19, supports the society's vision for Tse'k'wa: a site where community members, researchers and visitors can gather to learn about the land and Dane-zaa culture in a good way.

“My role, as I see it, is to support and elevate the community so that their voice can be heard. That means working very closely with the knowledge keepers, the language speakers and also the youth from these communities, because this is all being done for those future generations,” she says.

Born and raised in northern BC, Currie completed a degree in English and History at the University of Northern British Columbia before travelling to Victoria for her graduate studies. During her time at UVic, Currie participated in the co-op program, working in cultural heritage with Pouce Coupe Museum and Library and Archives Canada. In 2021, she was hired as the first staff member at Tse'k'wa Heritage Society.



ALYSSA CURRIE outside of Tse'k'wa—which means “Rock House” in Dane-zaa *Záágé?*, with Garry Oker, Tse'k'wa president.

In her work, Currie oversees day-to-day operations of the site and executes the strategic vision of the board. Describing her average day, she jokes that it includes a bit of everything—from writing grants to fund the construction of an accessible interpretive trail and amphitheatre, to working with archaeologists, to coordinating educational programs, to working with Elders and community members to plant a garden of traditional medicinal species.

“Every day has something new—a new challenge, a new learning opportunity,” Currie says with a grin. “I never have the same day twice.”

Made up of representatives from each of the three partner First Nations, the Tse'k'wa board has been working since the purchase of the site in 2012, building organizational capacity. In her early days as executive director, Currie and the board worked with communities to learn about their vision for the site, developing an interpretive strategy around what stories and cultural knowledge are appropriate to share with visitors.

She recalls the opening of the interpretive trail, which allows mobility-device users to access Tse'k'wa: “Some of my favourite memories are of speaking with Elders who are visiting the cave for the first time in decades, because now they can get to it.”

Today, when visitors arrive at Tse'k'wa, they are greeted by the words of the community's Elders. Repatriated archaeological artifacts are on display, their cultural significance explained alongside their archaeological import.

“Contrary to common belief, this is a culture that is still here, still surviving and thriving,” Currie says. “Getting to learn directly from the Elders and the language keepers and the community members and getting to elevate their work is the best thing that I could ask for.”



ALYSSA CURRIE processing moosehide during her 2022 UNBC Archaeology Field School at Tse'k'wa.



# Wave of Change

**Social Sciences grad Lucas Harris pours his passion for surfing and the environment into his current leadership role at Surfrider Foundation Canada.**

BY ANNE MACLAURIN, BA '91, CERT '00 (PR DIPLOMA)

Surfing amid a sea of ocean litter—plastic bags, straws, cigarettes—during a trip to Central America sparked a passion in Lucas Harris for beach cleanups and direct action. “Seeing all the plastic beach waste inspired me to do something to help the environment,” says Harris. “I was at an internet café in Honduras when I found the handbook for UVic’s Environmental Studies program.”

A dual passion for surfing and the environment meant the University of Victoria—close to BC’s surfing hot spots—was a natural choice for Harris. His discovery of Surfrider Foundation Canada coincided with the start of his environmental studies and political science degree in 2007.

Surfrider had a local volunteer-led chapter in Victoria that Harris got involved with that fall, which launched his 16-year journey with the organization. Today, he serves as executive director but has worked in every type of volunteer role. “I started taking more responsibility as chapter secretary in 2011, when we started to scale up operations with remote beach cleanup expeditions with BC Parks in Clayoquot Sound,” says Harris.

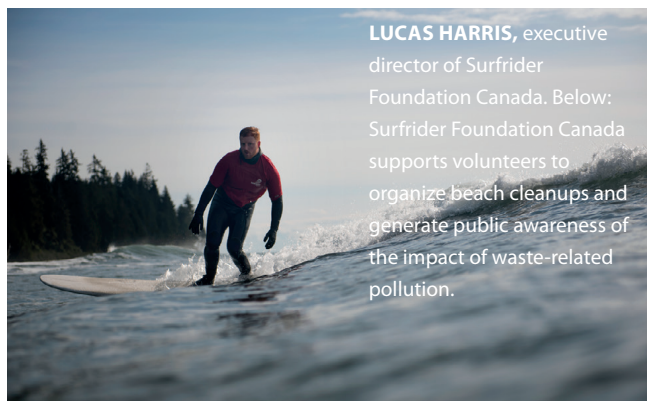
Before graduating from UVic in 2011, Harris completed his last co-op placement with the provincial government. Co-op is a powerful tool because it contextualizes what you are learning in the classroom, and it puts that learning into practice, observes Harris.

After a few temporary positions with the BC government, Harris landed a permanent role in the government’s Blue Box Recycling Program shortly after graduation. The same passion for pollution prevention that drove Harris to Surfrider has guided his career as a civil servant. But the overlap between work and volunteering got too close. “As a provincial regulator in the plastic-recycling program and an advocate with Surfrider, it was a conflict of interest so I resigned from Surfrider,” says Harris.

Toward the end of his career with the provincial government, he led development of the Clean Coast Clean Waters initiative, a program to support groups and businesses to do shoreline cleanup across the province. In 2020 when the global pandemic hit, Harris suggested shoreline cleanups as an idea for economic stimulus. “We got all the tour operators who were not able to do whale-watching, bear-watching tours and they used their boats and staff to do beach cleanups,” says Harris.

In spring 2021, while Harris was on parental leave from his provincial-government position, Surfrider Canada approached him about a role in the organization. “I had hit my ceiling in government, and I wanted to have more impact in my career,” explains Harris.

Surfrider is a global organization, and its presence in Canada was growing when they sought out Harris to lead the organiza-



**LUCAS HARRIS**, executive director of Surfrider Foundation Canada. Below: Surfrider Foundation Canada supports volunteers to organize beach cleanups and generate public awareness of the impact of waste-related pollution.



tion. Surfrider Canada has a small team, made up of several UVic grads, including regional manager Lilly Woodbury, MA '23, and UVic geography co-op grad Katie Keats, MSc '21, who serves as Beach Cleanup Manager.

Though it has few staff, Surfrider Canada supports a massive network of volunteers and partners. “As a direct-action organization, we give people training, a voice and platform to make a difference in their community,” says Harris.

Recently, UVic’s Environmental Law Centre (ELC) connected with Harris to further Surfrider’s advocacy work. “The research we get from ELC is fundamental to us putting together well-rounded campaigns directed at provincial and federal decision makers,” explains Harris.

Ultimately, Harris has to balance fundraising and advocacy, but his vision is for long-term sustainability. “I am learning new skills on how to run a national charity that has a major impact in protecting the coastal environment. While the work can be challenging, I am loving every minute of it.” 🌊

**Find a Surfrider beach cleanup near you at**  
[canada.surfrider.org/beach-cleanups](https://canada.surfrider.org/beach-cleanups).







From a rising star in comedy, to a legal eagle engaging women in politics, to a civil engineer harnessing tech to save lives, to a physiologist who helps top athletes, to a playwright with a unique work about land claims—we profile UVic alumni leading the world of performance.



# That One Girl Who Became an Internet Sensation

A keen eye for observation and a pitch-perfect “German Mother” earned Theatre grad **Laura Ramoso** millions of online followers as the comedian takes the world by storm.

BY JOHN THRELFALL, BA '96 • PHOTO BY KRISTINA RUDDICK



**LAURA RAMOSO** sold out theatres in Australia and Europe with her “Sit Up Straight” tour before taking on North America. Watch UVic alumni communications for a chance to win tickets to the Victoria show!





ike many artists, comedy sensation Laura Ramoso, BFA '16, struggled to find a way to practise her craft when the pandemic turned out the

stage lights in 2020. Her fledgling career in live comedy was just beginning when the world shut down. Instead of giving up, Ramoso got creative.

She decided to post a quick-cut observational comedy montage on TikTok as way of pivoting to a new platform. Her first video was "Girl who loves hikes." That led to more posts over a year, including "What you look like putting money in a street musician's guitar case," which became her first video to go viral. She kept creating and finally posted a video about her German mother—which changed everything.

Today, the 28-year-old Ramoso has more than a million followers on TikTok and Instagram each plus over 300,000 more on YouTube and Facebook, all thanks to her enormously popular videos featuring characters like German Mother, Italian Father and That One Girl Who Just Got Back From... (Australia, France, Copenhagen, etc). But she's also re-embracing live audiences with a 25-city global tour of her new show *Sit Up Straight*, which culminates in a performance at LA's *Netflix Is a Joke* comedy festival alongside A-listers like Jerry Seinfeld, David Letterman, Chris Rock, Maya Rudolph, Seth Rogen and some 300 other rising comedians. In the fall, she'll be in Victoria for a Nov. 1 show at the Royal Theatre as part of her North American tour.

"I'm flabbergasted by it all," says Ramoso, speaking from her home base in Toronto. "I just got really lucky. I mean, I prepared for it and did the work, but it is weird: what I was doing somehow cosmically matched up with people who were ready to receive it. I honestly don't know what I would be doing if COVID hadn't happened."

#### GROWING UP GLOBALLY

Born in Italy to—yes—a German mother and Italian father, Ramoso had an international upbringing that saw her grow up in Cameroon, Azerbaijan, China and Vietnam, due to her

mother's career with the World Health Organization. As a high-school student in Vietnam, she decided to move to Canada for university and enroll at UVic.

"I wanted the North American college experience that was in all the movies I watched, and my high school counsellor had a poster of UVic in her office," she recalls. "She suggested I apply because they had a great theatre program—so I did, and then I got in. It was honestly that simple."

She had never been to the west coast of North America before, let alone Vancouver Island. Did it live up to her expectations? "Absolutely! I had a great time. I drank alcohol out of red Solo cups, which was, like, 'Oh, wow, I'm in a college movie.' And I really enjoyed my classes."

Ramoso dreamed of being a classical actor when she was a theatre student at UVic. She appeared on stage in the supporting cast of Phoenix Theatre's 2015 production of *Amadeus*, and also worked front-of-house and backstage. Projects like the traditional end-of-run crew-show parodies planted a seed for unscripted satire. (Search YouTube for a 2016 student spoof of *The Office* called *The (Box) Office* for an early indication of her character-driven comedy chops.) "I always thought I wanted to be a classical actor, which is why I went to theatre school," she says. "But then I found I enjoyed comedy and improv more."

Ramoso fondly recalls her role in the show *Jewel* by then-Writing professor Joan MacLeod, which she performed as a graduation showcase with director and Theatre professor Fran Gebhard. "It was my first solo show, and I really enjoyed that experience," Ramoso says. "It was foundational for me to learn how much I enjoyed being on stage on my own."

Gebhard recalls Ramoso as a natural. "She was a fantastic student who was always thinking out of the box. She was very funny in class and had a great physicality; her writing was very intelligent and she had an excellent work ethic," says Gebhard. "She was such a clown, and I use that in the best sense of the word. Imagination is the greatest tool an actor has, and Laura was able to use hers exceptionally. Am I surprised by her success? Not at all. I always saw a special quality in her."

#### VIDEO MADE THE COMEDY STAR

On-stage talent aside, it's the internet that has crowned Ramoso a comedy queen. "It's a completely different medium than working live," she explains of her fast-cut, home-shot, slice-of-life videos. "It's a different set of comedy skills and a different way to get ideas out."

During a trip to Chicago, Ramoso experienced the famed Second City sketch comedy troupe. "That was an epiphany for me," she recalls. "In that moment I thought, 'OK, that's what I wanna do.'" She moved to Toronto to be part of its comedy



scene. She then spent three years in the city feverishly taking improv, writing and sketch classes. She performed most days and also wrote her first special, *Diane*. Amazingly, she was also earning an MBA from York University at the same time—something her German mother supported as practical.

But then the pandemic hit and Ramoso's creative outlet was shuttered. "I felt this real emptiness, because all I wanted to do was comedy. And when I saw other people making videos, it felt like one of the only ways I could use all that energy to express myself."

Ramoso found her childhood experiences fuelled her skill for observational comedy. "Growing up in international schools meant we had little in common with each other, so the easiest way to connect with people was through the small things that happen to us all. That's why I don't write about big things like politics or religion—it's the little stuff that's more universal. To this day, I'll get most of my ideas at house parties, social gatherings and public transport—the kind of places where people don't have their guard up and are just being themselves."

Then there's her parents. Ramoso's German Mother and Italian Father are her two most popular characters. ("My German mother when we go to the beach" currently has 22.9 million views on TikTok, while "My Italian father when he makes us dinner" clocks in at 10.5 million.) "My parents do like the online portrayals. They watch them, they send them to their friends, but obviously, these are two-dimensional characters while my parents are three-dimensional people. And yes, they do make suggestions, 'Oh, this could be a sketch' or 'Don't repeat what I just said.' But it's actually the things they aren't aware of about themselves that are the most interesting."

When it comes to creating her videos, Ramoso logs ideas on a phone app, then she'll pick one, work up a rough script and shoot 30 to 45 minutes of raw performance footage, which then gets edited down to a series of (often intentionally sloppy) quick-cuts. While the final one-minute video goes by hilariously quickly, each one actually takes between 10 to 20 hours to make. And with online analytics, she's able to instantly glean insight into her audience.

"That's the difference with being a 21st century comedian: you're on a digital platform, so you have access to analytics," she

observes. "OK, I've got a million followers on Instagram and TikTok: who are they and where are they based? I know over 50 per cent of my audience are women between 25 and 32, and I know the top cities and countries my followers are based in—which is a great place to start when planning a tour."

But all that insight also comes with a price. "It can really affect what I make: suddenly I'm thinking about who they are and where they're from and why they're watching and will they like *this* more than *this*? To be honest, I try not to think about it too much. You don't want to start creating content for a specific audience; I just want to make what feels good, which is how I got here in the first place. You just have to be yourself and the right audience will follow."

## ON THE ROAD AGAIN... FINALLY

When we spoke, Ramoso was just about to embark on a 2024 world tour to bring her latest live show *Sit Up Straight* to audiences in Canada, Australia, England, Finland, France, Holland, Ireland, Germany and Italy. "I cannot wait, but I really have no idea how it's going to go," she laughs. "Because I'm starting the European tour in Italy and ending in Germany, I'm hoping it feels like coming home, you know?"

Any pressure in bringing the hit characters German Mother and Italian Father to those respective countries? "Uh, I speak German less well than I speak Italian, but one of the reasons German Mother is funny is the way she says things in English, so while I might bust out a bit of German, I'll probably stick to English to stay true to the character. And currently the Italian Father is actually a mime piece set to a musical soundtrack in the live show, so he doesn't actually speak at all."

After Europe, Ramoso is off to the bright lights of LA to appear in the 10-day *Netflix Is A Joke* comedy festival, alongside most of the contemporary comedy scene. "It's my first time in LA and it's totally unbelievable this is why I'm going," she marvels. "I'm honoured to be part of that lineup, but I'm really excited to just go and do my thing—which is actually a great feeling, because it doesn't mean I have to change anything about myself."





## Quick Talk with Laura Ramoso

### **Best way to spend a free day in Toronto?**

"Get a flat-white and a pastry at one of the many cute cafés and hang out with your friends."

### **Favourite street food?**

"Mm, any sort of grilled meat."

### **What's a movie you always return to?**

"*Love Actually*."

### **What's your karaoke staple?**

"Gloria." (Preference for Umberto Tozzi's version.)

### **What's one condiment you can't live without?**

"Olive oil."

### **Favourite city you've been to or lived in?**

"Been to? Montréal. Lived in? Beijing, just for the everything-everywhere-every-year-bigness of it all."

### **Where do you have the most followers?**

"Australia."

### **How often do you post your videos?**

"Once a week, on average."

### **Who are your comedy influences?**

"Mr. Bean, Charlie Chaplin and the Italian sketch comedy trio Aldo, Giovanni & Giacomo."

### **Best performance memory?**

"The first time I took my solo show *Frances* to Vancouver."

### **Worst performance memory?**

"At my mother's 60th birthday party. I was just out of UVic and I tried to do a sketch of her but I had never done it before, and I completely bombed in front of 70 of my mom's closest friends. It was worse than bombing in front of an audience."

### **How was it being on CBC Radio's Q with Tom Power?**

"It was mind-blowing. They showed me the green room where all their guests have signed the wall and I was, like, 'What am I doing here?'"

### **You're performing at the Netflix showcase and a producer offers you a dream gig. What would it be?**

"My own TV special."

### **One piece of advice for current students?**

"Create your own work—just make what you want to make."

### **Best advice you were given?**

"It's so cliché, but never give up, never stop."

### **Best decision you ever made?**

"Making my first video." 📹



# A Passion for Politics

UVic Poli Sci grad **Rachael Segal** regards Canadian election night as her “Super Bowl,” and she’s on a mission to help women discover that engagement in politics can be invigorating and fun.

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



**RACHAEL SEGAL** returned to the UVic campus in February to take part in the Women Leading Change panel discussion, which delved into the experiences of women who’ve made significant contributions to the political landscape.

**E**

very Saturday, the listener puts her headphones on and takes a walk to listen to a podcast—without her young children by her side. She snaps a selfie, posts it on social media and labels it “Mom time.”

UVic alumna Rachael Segal thinks of that listener often. It’s Segal’s podcast, *Beyond a Ballot*, that the mother listens to with such dedication. It’s all about getting more women interested in politics and serving up that information in a fun, accessible way.

“I believe that we have lost an entire generation of women to this concept that politics is bad, and we’ve done nobody a service by trying to just educate women in the same ways over and over again about politics.” To do that she’s developed not just a podcast, but a business of the same name.

“My goal is to really change the narrative, to create a lifestyle brand around the concept of politics. So, years ago, I had the theory that we need



to bring politics to women, not women to politics, like we've been doing for an entire generation."

That means meeting women where they are—like the listener who tunes in on her solitary walk and tags *Beyond a Ballot* on social media. Segal has a passion for politics and wants to share that energy with others, particularly women. The name of the podcast is intended to suggest that while having more women trying to get elected is a worthy goal, having them engaged in politics is a needed first step.

Segal herself wears more hats than the peddler in the children's classic tale *Caps for Sale*. Segal is not only a podcast host, political strategist and entrepreneur, she's also a university lecturer and broadcast journalist with extensive experience on talk radio and television in Toronto. She is a regular guest on CBC television's *Power & Politics*.

Segal, who earned a BA in political science in 2009 at UVic before pursuing two law degrees, hosts the podcast with Amanda Alvaro, who leans more to the left, while Segal is more at home on the conservative/centrist side of things. The *Beyond a Ballot* website underlines: "We are fiercely multi-partisan." Their tagline: "We don't care what your position is, just that you have one."

Forget flashy stadium tours with long-legged singer-songwriters, what Segal is really looking forward to is the BC election. Politics changed her course of study at UVic and then her life, she says. For that reason, UVic has a special place in her heart.

"I started as a sociology major and ended up as a political science major, and that was really because of the voices on campus, the professors that I had, the concepts that they put in front of me. And from there, I thought I was going to go into not-for-profit. As a student leader, I met a federal cabinet minister who asked me to come to Ottawa. And so, I went from Victoria to Ottawa—and the rest changed my life."

Her time working in Ottawa fuelled her curiosity. She wanted to better understand the political process and the criminal-justice system, and that led her to pursue an undergrad law degree and later a Masters of Law. Politics has always been a catalyst for her to learn and to grow professionally—and now it has inspired her business.

The idea is to make *Beyond a Ballot* a lifestyle brand, eventually supported through brand partnerships, event sponsorship and possibly a membership model. Segal observes that every political party she has worked for has asked the same question: "How do we engage educated women between the ages of 25 and 55 to this political party?"

As well as podcasts, their recent offerings include a book club—which sold out in half an hour. Getting women on the ballot is important, but the first step is engagement—and

demystifying key information such as how to run a campaign. "We call ourselves a full life-cycle organization," she adds, speaking from her home in Vancouver.

Fewer women engaged means a lack of diversity at the decision-making table, she says. "And you know, I've seen it firsthand being involved in so many levels of government and so many political campaigns. Women just do politics differently. I think there's an old saying that says, 'Add women, change politics.'"

Lois Harder, UVic's dean of social sciences, is "all in" on *Beyond a Ballot*'s objectives. She observes that women have been so sidelined from politics in the past and change is needed. "We are in such desperate need of people with a vision of a better future. People who have the skills to bring different folks to the table and do that in a way that is about listening and responding and thinking collaboratively and collectively about how we move forward together, which is quite different than the adversarial model that we live in."

Harder notes that many people simply don't vote at all, either because they aren't informed or don't believe it will change anything. "They don't really feel that anything makes a difference, that parties are behaving in kind of prescribed ideological agendas, and it doesn't really matter what they think or what they desire."

She praises Segal's determination to make politics fun and avoid falling through the trap door of cynicism. "It's fantastic that she's a UVic grad, and we're super proud to have people who have this kind of commitment to public life, and that's what we need to make Canada the country it could be."

Segal and Alvaro currently host the *Beyond a Ballot* podcast as well as one called *Think You Know*, that is a deeper dive on the personalities in politics. More shows will be launching this year. Segal, who has two young daughters under age three, is currently on leave from a position with the BC United Party. The idea for the podcast came to her when she was home with her first child and doing a lot of listening, such as to the audio version of journalist Kate Couric's book.

"And I thought, how great would it be if we had moms like me on mat leave listening to a couple of friends chatting about things that are in the news, chatting about important political issues. And we were just part of people's rosters," she says. "And so, for me, that woman every week when she tags us, it's the reminder for me that the ultimate goal is for women to have an easy way to engage with the political resources and feel like they're part of a community, which is a huge aspect to what we're creating."

"Women balance so much in their lives, and especially women with young children, that we want to make this as easy





as possible. For them to just add it to their regular routines, to add one political touchpoint to their regular routine.”

One of Segal’s favourite aspects of her work is broadcasting, which she regards as an immense privilege. Segal started out as a full-time legal reporter, using her two law degrees to cover stories such as the explosive sex assault trial of former CBC radio host Jian Ghomeshi. She was often allotted just a three-minute slot of air time to update viewers on a complicated legal case.

She grew up in a home with people who loved politics, especially her father, a surgeon. “I think I was super political growing up, and I never really realized it, because I never had the understanding that everyone else’s house didn’t have the news on all the time.”

Having children of her own has revealed some hard truths. “Number One, bold, underlined it’s showed me how difficult it is to have time for politics,” she says. “Having kids is a huge barrier to entry for men and women.” Segal used to gladly work 20-hour days before having children. No more. While there have been positive changes to be more inclusive to families, such children being allowed onto the floor of the House in Ottawa, it’s not enough, she says.

“I think having girls has been for me also a huge thing. I feel like the universe gave me girls because I’m always advocating for women’s inclusion in politics. I’ve taken my two-year-old to political rallies. My children have met more political leaders than most kids will in their entire life.”

This is by design. “Politics, as I say, is part of everybody’s life. You know, you’re sitting in a room. The lights are on. BC Hydro is a government agency. You had eggs for breakfast. The cost of those eggs is determined by government. We’re not at war. That’s a government decision. So, government and politics impacts every single thing we do as human beings, and I want my girls to understand that.” She also wants her girls to understand that they can be a part of it all.

So how does Segal balance all those caps on her head? “With help. My whole existence is around community, and I have a village of people that believe in me, that pick me up when I think this is a futile effort,” she says, adding her mother, a nanny and her husband all share in the child care.

She does *not* believe in the concept of balance—and is willing to debate anyone over that. “And so, you know, I love my community, my business, Beyond a Ballot. I love my children. I love my husband. But I can only invest so much at every time. And so, you have to really follow the passions that you love.” She feels fortunate that her passion is for community building.

Segal would like to be on the ballot herself one day. “I mean, my home is federal politics. That’s where I started... I think I said this on the podcast. I’ve done most roles on campaigns except for being the candidate. And I really do want that experience one day.” 🗳️

## Segal’s favourite female politicians

**Federal:** MP Melissa Lantsman from Thornhill, ON

**Provincial:** MLA Shirley Bond, representing Prince George-Valemount, first woman to serve as BC’s Attorney General

**School Board:** Victoria Jung, Chair of Vancouver School Board

**Municipal:** Councillor Rebecca Bligh, City of Vancouver

## Favourite political TV show:

“Oh, my God, *Veep*, everybody should watch *Veep*. Everyone thinks *House of Cards* or *West Wing* are like reality. No, no, no. *Veep* is a 100 per cent accurate on how politics works,” she says. The satiric show starred Julia Louis-Dreyfus as vice-president of the United States. Segal recalls an episode in which the politician’s handlers plan a photo-op at an ice cream parlour. They debate for days what flavour of ice cream she should order, only to be thrown in a tailspin when their chosen flavour is unavailable.

## Bonus:

“If you want to know what it’s like to be a political staffer, you should just watch *The Devil Wears Prada*, because not to say that politicians are like Meryl Streep. But you kind of just have to roll with it.”



# Better Bridges

A tragic accident inspired UVic alumnus **Harsh Rathod, PhD '19**, to harness the power of AI and drones to improve the safety of infrastructure—and save lives.

BY DAVID SILVERBERG



After earning his PhD in 2019, **HARSH RATHOD** co-founded Victoria-based Niricson.

In 2016, Harsh Rathod was in the middle of his PhD in civil engineering at the University of Victoria and scrolling through news headlines on his phone. He noticed a media report that made him gasp: a bridge on the bustling Mumbai-Goa highway that some of his family members often used had collapsed, killing almost 30 people. Rathod called his family, found out they were safe, but the disaster still nagged at him, like an ache that wouldn't go away.

His doctoral work leaned into using robotics and computer vision (a field of AI) to assess the condition of dams, bridges and other forms of infrastructure. He began to realize it wasn't a far-fetched idea to do something about the structural degradation of those sites—and to launch a company layering innovative tech to make it easier to do so.

In January 2020, after earning his PhD in 2019, he co-founded Victoria-based Niricson with Aki Tomika, CTO, who brought years of experience in the tech industry. The name Niricson comes from the Sanskrit word nireekshan, which means “inspection” or “detailed investigation.” The company

leverages drones and AI to assess bridges, airport runways and hydro dams. The team has tested infrastructure at various sites, including Toronto's Pearson International Airport, Southern Saskatchewan's Gardiner Dam and Australia's Cataract Dam. Niricson, a company of 50 people, currently has clients in Canada, US, UK, Australia and New Zealand.

## SOUND INFORMATION

Civil engineers and inspectors were still using some old-fashioned methods to analyze if a massive asset like a bridge is compromised—so the Niricson team sought to improve on those. “Believe it or not, they still use a pen and paper and hammer—to tap the concrete to find out if it's hollow,” says Rathod, who is CEO of Niricson. “And X-rays may be used as well, but that's very rare, perhaps less than one per cent of all inspections.”

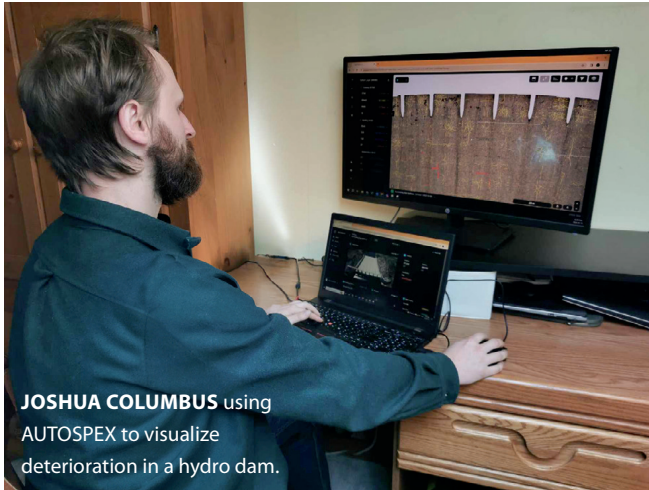
Focusing on a data-driven approach, Niricson collaborates with drone companies to set up a program for clients where site information can be ingested through Niricson's proprietary platform—AUTOSPEX™. Those drone flyovers can offer valuable data to the client on an asset's status beyond what a manual inspection can accomplish. The key is that the drones don't just harness visual capabilities, but they can also assess a site with thermal and acoustic technology (known as DRONIC™).

The thermal technology software dives up to 50 mm into the subsurface of the concrete, and acoustic tests can process even more data by going up to 200 mm into the structure. “Combine those three layers and we feature a shared intelligence report that can share any deficiencies and how deteriorations over time have progressed,” Rathod says.

The drones' cameras can identify falling concrete chunks, vegetation, salt deposits and rust stains that signal potential damage. The thermal technology analyzes any temperature differences. A hollow area within concrete may present with a big red or blue spot, depending if the temperature has risen very high or low. The thermal feature of Niricson's AUTOSPEX™ software can also look for any moisture/leakage, which is extremely difficult to do by sight.

The acoustic side of a drone flyover will include the gadget holding a hammer that engineers still employ, and the system collects “sounding and vibration data” to better understand how the concrete vibrates and if it's still sound concrete. Using





audio technology, the drone can “hear” if the concrete is hollow. “The manual method of doing this is very challenging, no matter how finetuned someone’s ears may be,” he says.

For the Toronto Pearson airport contract in 2022, Rathod and his team spent hours on the runway with drones to compile a detailed 3D model of the 60,400 square-metre asset along with quantified defect maps. Being able to accurately scan this runway served as a litmus test for Niricson, which has since gone on to analyze runways in Montreal and Vancouver.

Rathod, who lives in Vancouver, says their system takes advantages of AI tech and computer vision “teaching the machine to recognize patterns in things like cracking, spalling, slab offset and honeycombing etc., which totals around nine million data sets at the moment.”

In August 2023, Niricson secured over \$10 million in Series A financing led by MUUS Climate Partners. That kind of funding, the first raised by outside investors, will go towards “product development and the ability to take on more projects,” Rathod says.

## A NATURAL INNOVATOR

Raised in Gujarat, India, Rathod always felt he was different growing up. “I hated doing the same thing everyone else was doing. I could feel like I thought outside the box, so to speak,” he recalls. Being an entrepreneur was a natural choice for Rathod. His father and four brothers started their own company from the ground up, running a business that supplied auto parts to the Indian army.

After graduating with civil engineering degrees from Nirma University, Rathod considered Canadian universities for his doctoral work over American equivalents because he perceived the immigration process and Vvisa requirements to be more favourable in Canada. At UVic, he soon realized how fortunate he was to move to Canada. “Here, the opportunities are endless, and I found that people are so nice, and that they are more than happy to help you and support you and your vision.”

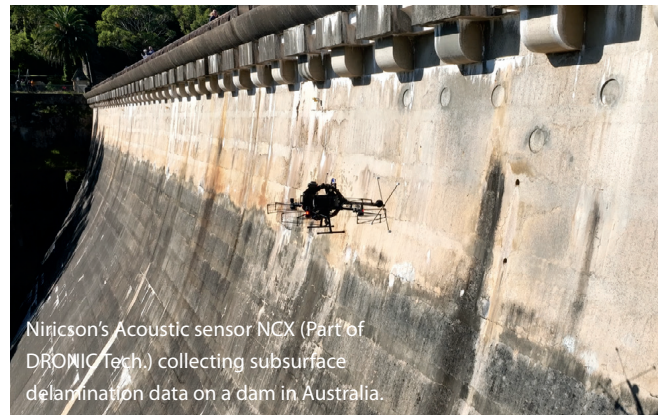
His doctoral work focused on using high-tech tools to assess infrastructure, and then Rathod’s passion for construction led him to serve as vice president of the UVic ACI (American Concrete Institute) student chapter from 2015 to 2017, promoting educational involvement in the concrete industry.

While still a student, Rathod took his idea for Niricson and presented its business model to the semi-annual PlanIt competition, run by UVic’s Coast Capital Innovation Centre. His short presentation earned him a win for the business plan and \$5,000. After Niricson was awarded \$19,000 from a larger start-up competition prize at the University of Washington, the team was ready for the spotlight. They approached BC Hydro to discuss assessing their dams with drone and AI technology. BC Hydro became Niricson’s first and most loyal client.

Rathod’s start-up is part of an asset-assessment sector that is evolving at a vital time. The 2019 Canadian Infrastructure Report showed that the state of the nation’s infrastructure is at risk. For example, findings showed that almost 40 per cent of roads and bridges are in fair or worse condition and only 20 per cent of the assets were constructed in the last 20 years. Engineering specialists in Canada also recognize the potential impact of climate change to infrastructure.

Rathod is adept at communicating with clients who have concerns about their assets and ask him how Niricson will offer a superior approach to surveying concrete for leaks and cracks. “I can speak engineer to engineer, so in that way, talking to customers came easily to me,” he says, adding how he’s thankful for the business acumen of co-founder Aki Tomita.

What Rathod finds fulfilling about blazing a trail in damage-assessment software comes down to the final outcome. “When we find deficiencies and we can see how our clients react to finding out that, say, they have a serious issue with a concrete chunk about to fall apart, that is a huge boost for me. And that joy, that motivation, is transferred down to our team and they are just as pumped up as I am to align with our mission to save people’s lives.”

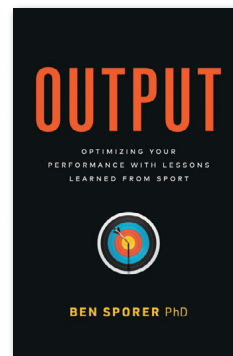




# Top of Your Game

Olympic physiologist **Ben Sporer**, BSc '98, MSc '01, has distilled years of learning into his new book, *Output*, which shows how anyone can borrow principles from sport to reach their goals.

BY JENNY MANZER, BA '97



**BEN SPORER**, VP of Performance Strategy at the Vancouver Whitecaps FC, created a five-year plan for the team. Sporer's book *Output: Optimizing Your Performance with Lessons Learned from Sport* was published in 2023.

**B**en Sporer's journey to becoming an author began with a single step up the hiking trails near his home on Vancouver's North Shore. The sports physiologist had already helped Olympians rise to the podium and kick-started a new plan for the Vancouver Whitecaps Football Club. The problem at hand was how to while away the pandemic, which he did by hiking with his wife, Trina.

The duo, who are partners in life and in their consulting business, Resync, talked on those trails about what Sporer might include in a book. He was continually asked by top athletes and other individuals for advice and a game plan on how to improve performance. The UVic

double-grads enjoy helping people, so while they roamed, Trina started recording some of Ben's thoughts.

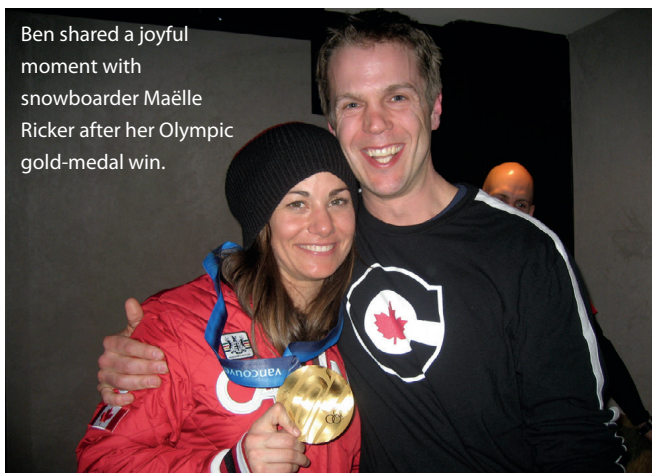
Eventually, those recordings and thoughts based on decades of work became the foundation for a new book, *Output: Optimizing Your Performance with Lessons Learned from Sport*. It's not lost on Sporer that the very methodology he describes in the book is the one he used to complete it.

## FALLING IN LOVE AT UVIC

Sporer, who earned a Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology from UVic in 1998, and later a Master of Science in Physical Education in 2001, started his working life in computers, but attended UVic because he wanted to be involved in sports and the culture of constantly trying to perform. He played lacrosse at a high level and adores all sports. He took an undergrad kinesiology class with Howie Wenger, now a professor emeritus in the School of Exercise Science, Physical and Health Education, and was captivated by Wenger's ability to convey complex ideas in a way that was easy to understand. Sporer finished his physiology degree



Ben shared a joyful moment with snowboarder Maëlle Ricker after her Olympic gold-medal win.



and was eventually invited by Wenger to work in the Sport and Fitness Testing Lab, including with NHL athletes during the pre-season. “It was a great living lab,” says Sporer. Wenger had a unique way of flipping questions back at you for you to answer yourself, he recalls. “He did so in a way that always made me feel empowered. He was super inspirational to me, and I know to a lot of other people as well.”

Wenger, in turn, remembers Sporer as enthusiastic, bright and intelligent. “Ben loved to bring theory to practice all the time. It wasn’t just about building theory.” Wenger says people who work in a lab spend a lot of hours together. “Ben was really personable. He fit in with the group. He was the kind of guy who made the group better just by being there.”

While at UVic, Sporer fell in love with physiology and later, Trina, who was in one of his fourth-year classes. It turned out Trina, who earned a BA in Kinesiology in 1998 and later an MA in Physical Education in 2005, had an identical twin sister who was also a UVic student—which explained why he kept seeing her on campus. “For the longest time I thought they were the same person, so I would always say ‘Hi,’” he laughs.

Sporer went on to earn an Honours degree at UVic with Dr. David Docherty, followed by a Master of Science with Wenger, which eventually led to Sporer helping to build a sport institute while becoming one of Canada’s first full-time physiologists working in sport. He worked with the Pacific Sport Institute and then the Canadian Sport Institute Pacific to support various sports, including triathlon, snowboarding and cycling. He ran a bunch of “top secret projects” for Own the Podium, and performed work with the World Anti-Doping Agency, studying asthma inhalers. As if this wasn’t enough, he also completed a PhD at the University of BC.

Sporer worked with sport institutes until 2011, when he started his own company, Resync Consulting. He continued

working with teams until 2016, steering the Canadian snowboard team through the 2014 Olympics to set them up for the next phase. He also began advising the Vancouver Whitecaps FC, and in 2019, helped build a new performance strategy to drive performance on the field. Now VP of Performance Strategy at the Whitecaps, he put together a five-year plan to help set them up for the future.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF OUTPUT

A key concept that Sporer has adopted over the years is to focus on the context of the individual or team. It really is not always about winning, he stresses. He cites his pride in two Canadian cyclists with whom he worked who had exceptional performances at the 2008 Beijing Olympics—well beyond expectations—and one would have medalled if not for a mechanical problem. He draws a key distinction between “outcome” and “output.”

“We always gauge performances on outcome. We think about someone’s performances in a game, and we talk about did they win or did they lose, did they place, did they medal, did they hit the mark that they wanted to... and the challenge with that is an outcome is not just related to how you performed, it’s actually related to how you performed, how your opponent performed, how a referee or the weather or the other coaching... there are so many factors, your performance is just one of those pieces.”

In the book, he writes: “Human performance is the ultimate execution of your goals to meet an objective. It is an output, not an outcome. This is true not just for sport but for any and every aspect of your life. To perform in a way that is sustainable over time, you have to think critically about the decisions and factors that influence your output.”

Both performances by the Olympic cyclists were far better than expected. “Those are moments where I get really excited, because you see someone perform in that moment. They deliver on demand,” he says.

Sporer was also proud to be part of the team that helped Canadian snowboarder Maëlle Ricker to be the first Canadian female athlete to win Olympic gold on home soil. In Turin 2006, she’d had a devastating crash that left her with a concussion and torn muscles—so the 2010 gold carried even more shine. Still, for every win, there is a loss—and it’s always hard for the athletes who crash or have something unfortunate happen.



Those eventualities, part of “the outcome,” are what you can’t control. But you can control your “output,” which includes preparation. In the book, Sporer divides performance into four core characteristics: physical, mental, tactical and technical. He adds that you could break “physical” into probably 100 different things, and when we perform it’s really an integrated output. Some people might be strong in one area and weaker in another.

The theories hold true in work and in the rest of our lives. A brain surgeon might lean heavily on the “technical” bucket, but physical plays a part, too, such as the surgeon’s ability to withstand stress and long hours. Given that output is what you can control and outcome is what happens on the day, if a person wants to succeed in a performance, they need to look at what’s required in terms of the four core elements to increase the likelihood of success.

## THE SECRET OF HIGH PERFORMANCE

High-performing teams, the ones that win year after year, have narrowed that variability. For example, their coaches have prepared them to bounce back after bad calls or setbacks. Sporer also worked with people who were sustained high performers in their chosen field—including artists, executives and athletes. He found eight characteristics that tended to repeat themselves across high performers, such as a growth mindset, but you don’t need to have all of them to be a high performer, he adds.

In the book, he uses an example of a female executive who excels at her job, until eventually, the long days of travel involved in her success starts to eat away at her wellbeing—which comes with a performance cost. His experiences and work in performance also served as a catalyst to make changes in his own life.

He and Trina decided together more than a decade ago that he would leave the sport institute. The travel was not compatible with being a great partner and an involved father, which was what he valued. “I was exhausted. I wasn’t able to train. I wasn’t able to stay physically active because I was travelling all the time... I was exhausted when I came home, so I didn’t have time to put in with my kids, with Trina...”

He’s constantly looking forward to what he wants to achieve and how to prepare. At 53, he wants a future in which he continues to mountain bike and ski with his two children—so he continues to prepare his body as best he can. Part of the beauty

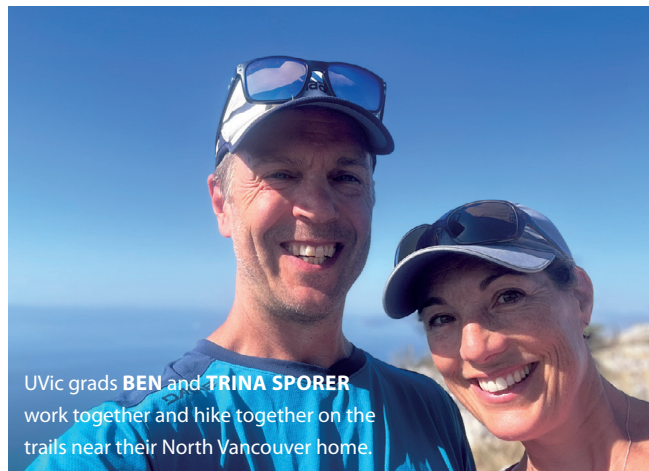
of analyzing output versus outcome is that it allows people to recognize what they can and can’t control. He admits that after the long hours of preparation, the losses can be rough.

“Those sit strong and really deep with me after experiencing it with those athletes. The disappointment and rejection. When you perceive it with an output lens, it empowers you to feel that you are in control. You become much more accountable. They also learn to separate their performance from the outcome. This gets a little pushback sometimes in the performance-sport world. That doesn’t mean you settle... what it does is allow you to be very clear about why you didn’t achieve your objective.”

The book is a chance for Sporer to widely share all he’s learned over the years about performance—a journey that started at UVic. “I’d love to stress the influence UVic had on our family and our lives. It was an amazing experience for both Trina and me.”

He learned to think critically at UVic’s Exercise Science, Physical & Health Education School. “It’s almost like a family. It’s a small enough school, but it’s a big enough school. I think that fostered a lot of that ability for me to be connected to the McKinnon Building, the faculty that was there, build relationships with Howie, be involved in the school.”

Meeting Trina was the most important milestone at UVic, he laughs. She’s his life partner, his business partner—and the driving force behind the book. “Yeah, she’s everything,” he says. †



UVic grads **BEN** and **TRINA SPORER** work together and hike together on the trails near their North Vancouver home.

# Choosing Her Path

Theatre grad **Medina Hahn**'s latest success is the interactive multi-platform reconciliation story *Inheritance: A Pick-the-Path-Experience*.

JOHN THRELFALL, BA '96



down of its only live production at Vancouver's Orpheum Theatre Annex in 2020, *Inheritance* went on to be published by Talonbooks, recorded as an interactive audio book with Penguin Publishing, filmed as a choose-your-own-adventure-style movie and shortlisted for the 2022 Governor General's Award for English-language drama.

"We really have explored four different, interactive storytelling vehicles with this project," says Hahn, who is Lebanese. "Not because we are crazy, but because of how important *Inheritance* has been—and how important the discussions are—for all of us."

Each audience member at the Annex's *Inheritance* production had a personal handheld controller to cast a vote at critical

times. The action begins with an immigrant/settler urban couple (Hahn and Arnold) on a getaway to visit her father at his rural estate. But when they arrive, they find him missing and a local Indigenous man (Dennis) staying there instead. The couple asks the man to leave... and, with an anonymous click, the audience chooses what happens next. The audience is very much in control as this story of colonial land rights unfolds with humour, suspense and a race against time. There are over 50 possible variations in the journey.

Hahn worked hard during her time in UVic's Theatre department. "It was all about giving us a well-rounded view of what it meant to be part of a theatre company, so you had a lot of respect for everyone's different jobs when you did get cast in a professional show. UVic allowed us to see all the angles—in a funny way, it made us all jack-of-all-trades."

Those skills turned out to be essential when she followed up her UVic degree by attending the University of Alberta, where she first met her longtime creative partner, Daniel Arnold.

The two established their own production company, Dual-Minds, and had immediate success co-writing and touring a string of notable plays, such as the award-winning *Tuesdays and Sundays* (2000)—which had radio adaptations on both CBC (starring Hahn and Arnold) and BBC (featuring future *Doctor Who*'s David Tennant)—and *Any Night* (2008), which eventually

**A**

ny professional actor will tell you that success in the industry demands a combination of talent, determination and plain old hard work. But Vancouver-based actor, singer and writer Medina Hahn, BFA '97, would add another essential element to that

equation: synchronicity. "Whether it's synchronicity, pure chance or more of a calling, I do feel very lucky," she says.

Certainly, there seemed to be an element of luck at work around her latest success, the reconciliation-based suspense play *Inheritance: A Pick-the-Path Experience*, co-written and co-performed with Daniel Arnold and Darrell Dennis, an Indigenous performer from the Secwepemc Nation, and produced by Touchstone Theatre and Alley Theatre. Following a COVID shut-



earned an Off-Broadway run. Together, they were also chosen by acclaimed Canadian playwright Daniel MacIvor to receive the Siminovitch Prize Protégé Award in 2008.

But *Inheritance* owes its origins to another stroke of luck, when they were both cast in a 2011 Kamloops production of Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* alongside future co-writer Darrell Dennis. "Daniel loves structure and had wanted to do a choose-your-own-adventure play for years, and he brought it up again when we were all in *Betrayal*. He was throwing around the idea of people squatting in a house or cabin and talked to Darrell about the idea of an inheritance—what we're given, what we inherit and how we deal with that."

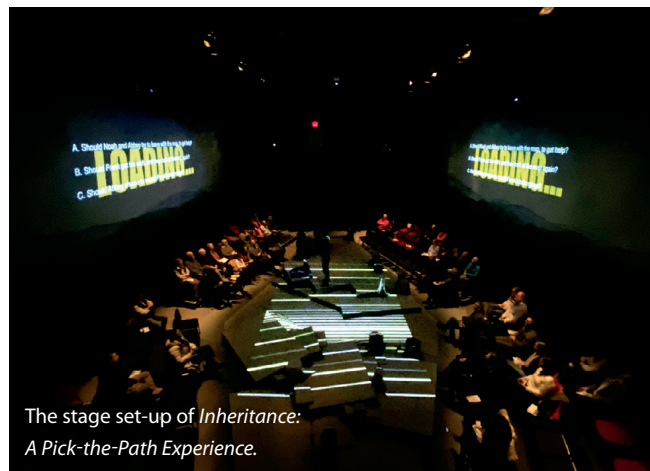
The story continued to develop over the next few years as BC began implementing land acknowledgements, Arnold became more interested in learning about Canada's true history and Hahn's personal life changed. She married a Vancouver restaurateur, who astoundingly, owned an establishment called Medina. They started a family. But Arnold kept hitting walls and couldn't move forward with it, so he approached Dennis and Hahn about coming on board as co-writers in 2017. That's when they started looking at Indigenous versus settler points of view, and adding in an immigrant female perspective to help find the heart of the story.

"Daniel is always heady and analytical while I'm more like the heartbeat of our work, but this was my first time writing a new play since having children," she says. "I had so much to learn about Canada's true history, all the things we were never taught in school. It became a great example of how theatre can push essential conversations and put new concepts in front of audiences. If you make it interesting—like giving the audience controllers and having on-stage screens come down—then it's like a video-game experience in which the audience votes for the outcome."

### CHOOSING HER OWN ADVENTURE

Regardless of format, Hahn says it's essential that *Inheritance* remains a character-driven, not concept-driven, story. "We really didn't want any of the 50 variations to be cop-outs, where you choose a path but then the story just loops back to where we wanted people to go anyway," she says.

While shooting on the film adaption wrapped in 2023, she doesn't expect it out until 2025 (a North American book tour is



The stage set-up of *Inheritance*:  
A Pick-the-Path Experience.

being planned in the meantime). "The theatrical release will have a linear path, but I'm sure there'll be some festival screenings where people will have controllers," she explains. "The goal is when you're at home, you can just tell Alexa which path you want to take. Both Netflix and Amazon have interactive platforms for watching it online."

Ultimately, Hahn feels *Inheritance* has a much-needed message for our troubled times.

"The anonymity of the online experience allows people to say the most hateful things that they would never say publicly—it's just shocking, and it's not allowing for conversation to happen anymore," she says. "Which is why *Inheritance* is so refreshing and was such a gift to be a part of: the conversations we all had to have to create it were very difficult. But the goal was to create an understanding of all points of view, and for no side of the conversation to be the 'right' one."

Hahn clearly recalls being in a cabin together with Dennis and Arnold as part of the Playwrights Lab at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, discussing questions like, "What does reconciliation mean?" and "What would it entail?"

"We were in a safe environment, and we knew we cared about each other, so we were able to have these tough conversations," she says. "That's an essential part of creating art, yet it's just so hard to do in the world now: everyone's on their devices and fighting for their own point of view. I wish we could all have those conversations in our own lives—but if we can't do it in life, at least we can still do it in art." †

## DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARDS

# Outstanding Alumni Honoured

Recipients and supporters gathered at a downtown Victoria reception in April.

PHOTOS BY ARMANDO TURA AND MICHAEL KISSINGER



2024 DAA recipients (from left to right): **JON CARR**, **MELINDA BIGE**, **KATL'JA LAFFERTY**, **LYDIA TOORENBURGH**, supporter Norine Lafferty, and **JESS HOUSTY**.

The University of Victoria and the UVic Alumni Association celebrated the eighteen recipients of this year's Distinguished Alumni Awards with a reception at Victoria's Hotel Grand Pacific.

Fifteen of the recipients joined in person for the festivities, which included food, family and lots of laughter and connection. Guests joined from near and far, including recipients who travelled from Austin, Texas and Prince Edward Island.

Scan the QR code or go to [uvic.ca/distinguished-alumni](https://uvic.ca/distinguished-alumni) to read profiles and Q&A's with each recipient.



### This year's Distinguished Alumni Award recipients are:

#### PRESIDENTS' ALUMNI AWARDS

Rob Bennett, BSc '83  
Susan Blanchet, BA '97, JD '02  
Jonny Morris, BA '07, MA '11  
Bren Simmers, BA '00  
Danielle Stevenson, BA '10  
Carrie Tennant, BMus '99, PDT '00

#### EMERGING ALUMNI AWARDS

Scott Beatty, MAsC '09, PhD '15  
Dennis Gupa, PhD '21  
Katl'ja (Catherine) Lafferty, JID '23  
Trevor MacKenzie, BA '03, PDT '04, MEd '20  
Karen Saini, BSW '15, MPA '18  
Jayesh Vekariya, MBA '19  
Fiona Wong, JD '20

#### INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY ALUMNI AWARDS

Melinda Kachina Bige, MA '16  
Jon Carr, BSc '10, BEd '12  
Jess Housty (Cúagilákv), BA '09  
Ivy Martin, Dipl '23  
Lydia Toorenburgh, BA '18, MA '23





Emerging Alumni Award recipient **JAYESH VEKARIYA** with Priyanka Vekariya (left).



Presidents' Award recipient **CARRIE TENNANT**.



Presidents' Alumni Award recipient **DANIELLE STEVENSON**.



Presidents' Award recipients **SUSAN BLANCHET** with **ROB BENNETT**.



Emerging Alumni Award recipient **TREVOR MACKENZIE** (centre) with L to R: Sarah MacKenzie, Gregor MacKenzie, Ewan MacKenzie.



Presidents' Alumni Award recipient **JONNY MORRIS**.



Emerging Alumni Award recipient **FIONA WONG** with her father, Henry Wong.



Presidents' Alumni Award recipient **BREN SIMMERS** (centre) with (left) Christian Fink-Jensen, (right) Uvic President Kevin Hall.

# Faith, Fuel and the Life of a Poet

Award-winning poet **Cara-Lyn Morgan** explores cultural duality, family secrets and the harms of colonialism in her latest book, *Building a Nest from the Bones of My People*.

BY JOHN THRELFALL, BA '96

Cara-Lyn Morgan grew up as a bit of a nomad, living at various times in Regina, SK, Windsor, ON and BC's Okanagan region. She originally moved to Victoria to attend Camosun College's criminal justice program and complete a criminology degree she had begun earlier at the University of Windsor.

But it turned out that Morgan was a poet at heart. The University of Victoria entered the picture as her Camosun program was wrapping up, and she decided to enroll as a Visual Arts student—initially only taking Writing courses on the side. “I had no plans of it being anything other than four years of creating art and maybe writing a few things,” she recalls. “But I never even finished my visual arts degree because I was so taken by poetry.”

For some students, the path through life is clear; others take a more circuitous journey to arrive at their destination. Morgan, who earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2008, definitely sees herself in the latter camp, but the publication of her latest collection—*Building a Nest from the Bones of My People*—finds her weaving the various strands of her life into a powerful book of poetry fusing both sides of her cultural history. Morgan has both Indigenous (Métis) and immigrant (Trinidadian) roots.

“I feel like poetry has to do with the human voice in all of us,” she says. “I realize now that I’ve been a poet my whole life, but I just never understood what poetry was until I took my first class [at UVic]—no one had ever told me it was about more than just making up little cute rhymes.”

Part of that love of the lyrical stemmed from the Writing department's poetic giants of the day: Lorna Crozier and Tim Lilburn, plus acclaimed instructors Carla Funk and Steven Price. “It was Tim who identified early on that I had a unique Afro-Indigenous voice that hadn't been heard in Canada before,” Morgan recalls. “My professors saw the value of my work and recognized that I had a fresh perspective; that made me realize there was a seat at the table for me as a poet. That faith really fuelled my desire to put my work out in the world.”

Thanks to her Trinidadian father, Morgan was familiar with Caribbean and African-American authors, but it was at UVic that she first started to explore her Indigenous identity through the work of Canadian Indigenous poets like Gregory Scofield and Louise Halfe—and also with other students.

“The first time I was really exposed to Indigenous people was through the Indigenous student association,” she recalls. “Coming from a Métis family that had passed for white, it didn't really mean much to me before; I guess I had always seen the two parts of my culture as very dual, so I now had to navigate how to combine them. I started to see an interconnection between these two cultural realities and began to braid them together as the product of colonization.”

The braiding continued off-campus as well, when her criminology background led to a job with the Canada Border Services Agency. “I wrote my first poetry collection in between ferries while sitting in the Victoria/US border booth—a lot of that work was actually written on those little declaration cards you get when you come across the border,” she chuckles.



CARA-LYN MORGAN released her third book of poetry, *Building a Nest from the Bones of My People*, in fall 2023.

Currently based in Toronto, Morgan still works for the Canada Border Services Agency (now in Indigenous affairs)—a position she holds thanks in part to some advice from Lorna Crozier.

“I remember sitting in Lorna's office and telling her that I wanted to be a poet,” Morgan recalls. “She said to me, ‘Are you independently wealthy? Because every artist needs a job that will allow them to create their work.’ She basically told me that the idea of the starving poet is a myth, which freed me up to realize that a good, steady government job can actually be inspiring and offer the space and time and money to create work in a way that's really free.”

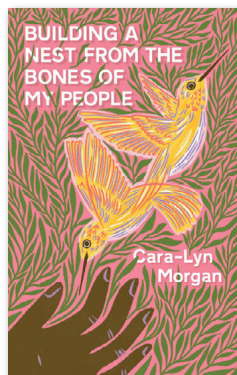
Clearly it was good advice, as Morgan's first two poetry collections, *What Became My Grieving Ceremony* and *Cartograph*, were released in 2014 and 2017. Her latest, *Building a Nest from the Bones of My People*, was published in the fall of 2023 and explores the colonial injury of Black and Indigenous people from an intergenerational perspective.

She sees the history of Canadian colonization—both the transatlantic slave trade and First Nations enfranchisement and oppression—as two sides of a coin, which she explores in her new collection. “It was really about unifying those sides for me... I was able to stop feeling like I had a split personality and it was just part of the whole story.”



Beginning with a revelation of familial sexual abuse, *Building a Nest* charts the impact and estrangement resulting from this trauma, while also navigating first-time motherhood and exploring the complexities of how generational and secondary abuse are intertwined with Black and Indigenous narratives in Canada's cultural landscape.

"Lorna once told me that your family will always read your first collection—that's where you write whatever you want them to know about you—and they may read the second one, but likely not your third book," she says. "So I thought it was a safe time to try writing about some of the difficult realities of my family... but then my sister sent me a text saying, 'Mom's reading your book right now!' and I thought, 'Damn it, Lorna said no one would read it!'"



*Building a Nest from the Bones of My People*, Invisible Publishing, 2023

Fortunately, Morgan says the book was received "with love and grace" by the family members who have given her feedback. "It was written from a place of love. I was just trying to navigate my own perspective, my own trauma; we can't be afraid of our own truth."

The truth of Canada's history with colonization isn't pretty, a fact Morgan keeps in mind when she's writing. "I always try to work on a level of humanity and grace with ourselves as people who are healing, which harkens back to how we navigate the space from the perspective of colonized people and why that informs our ability to heal," she explains. "There's something about poetry that gets right to the bones of us, that allows us to heal... It's in our genetic memory, like an internal dialogue." ¶

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# Capturing Memories

**Chelsea Warren** turned her focus from science to photography to fulfill her creative drive and run her own business.

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

**Name:** Chelsea Warren  
(formerly MacMillan)

**Age:** 36

**Hometown:** Victoria, BC

**UVic degree:** Bachelor of Science in Biochemistry, 2010

**What I used to be:** A scientist. I was planning to pursue further science studies after my Biochem degree.

**Then I had the idea to:** Use my creative passion in photography to make a career that I fully control.

**Why I did it:** I bought myself a new camera as a graduation gift as I have always loved photography and the creative arts just as much as I love science. The same summer I graduated from UVic, I photographed my first wedding alongside another photographer. I never looked back—looking forward through the lens of a camera was an instant comfort for me. The flexibility and creative aspects of a photography career were appealing and allowed me to develop business knowledge while doing something I truly enjoyed.

**How I did it:** I took on smaller jobs photographing families and weddings and continued to hone my skills while growing my business and portfolio. It was a steep learning curve to become a business owner and all the additional responsibility that comes with it, but it has been absolutely worth it.

**What I love about my new life:** I love being a business owner, and I love being connected with people and our community. Being invited into so many intimate and important moments in peoples' lives is amazing, and being able to create art and capture memories is an honour. It is so beautiful to be able to watch families grow and document them over the years. Being invited back each time at various stages and milestones in their lives is the biggest compliment. The freedom of choosing your work hours, workload and time off is invaluable, especially with young children.

**What I miss about my old life:** Leaving your work behind at the end of the day. In my role there is always something to be



edited, pre-planned or simply imagined, along with the social media and content creation, which is never ending.

**One lesson learned:** Always invest in yourself, and if you want to try something, never be afraid of being bad at it. You have to start somewhere, and there is always room to grow.

**One person who helped me:** My husband and kids are always encouraging me to bring to fruition my many, many ideas, and they have confidence in me even when I don't have confidence in myself.

**One trade secret:** There is always room for your art in the world, no matter how many other artists there are.

**You can find me:** On social media  
@chelseawarrenphotography or on my website  
chelseawarrenphotography.com 📷







CHELSEA WARREN PHOTOGRAPHY



# We're listening.

We hope you enjoy reading the UVic Alumni Torch Magazine.

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Complete the survey at the link below to be entered into a draw to win one of four \$250 VISA gift cards.



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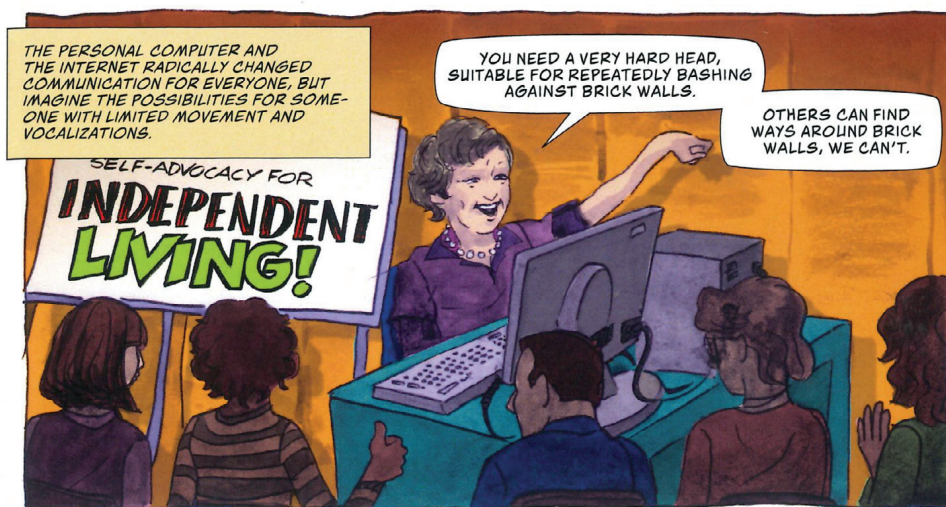
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# Wings on my Wheels

**Donna Pistell** defined her own lifetime of adventure and achievement, defying the expectations of others. Her intrepid spirit lives on through a unique endowed student award at UVic.

BY SARAH TARNOPOLSKY



A panel and cover image from *Wings on My Wheels* courtesy of Five Friends Publishing.

**D**onna Pistell was surrounded by friends when she passed away at her home in Sidney, BC in 2020. She was 80 years old and living independently in her own condo—something doctors in 1940 declared would never be possible, due to the brain injury she sustained at birth that resulted in severe cerebral palsy.

Those same friends, who had been at Pistell's side for many of her life experiences, decided to memorialize her remarkable story in a book. The 24-page graphic biography *Wings on my Wheels* chronicles Pistell's journey from a child who struggled to communicate, to a confident, adventurous adult who attended university, wrote and spoke publicly, advocated for other people with disabilities, took sailing lessons and travelled locally and internationally. Gradually, advances in technology—a personal computer, the internet and a power wheelchair—had given Pistell the increased mobility, independence and social connection she craved since she was young.

After Pistell's death, her friend of 50 years, Sachi Tamura, found some of Pistell's oldest personal essays.

"She had hopes and dreams from the beginning right up to the end," Tamura shares. "She had a wide imagination and imagined being able to travel to all these places and be an archeologist."

During her 40s, Pistell studied anthropology at the University of Victoria and worked as a research assistant for one of her professors. "To actually find herself qualified to go to UVic and sit in classes with people who had an equal curiosity in the subject—that was a huge dream fulfilled," says Tamura.

Finally, at age 70, she achieved her dream of a trip to Greece, where she spent a month visiting museums and archaeological digs. In her will, Pistell created a legacy fund to facilitate this kind of travel experience for UVic students with severe disabilities. She named it the TED Fund in honour of her

parents, Ted and Eleanor (plus Donna), but also to express the fund's purpose: travel experience for disabled persons.

"The whole idea of the award was 100 per cent Donna. The details of it and everything," says Tamura. "And I think she was just thinking of this person that she had been, that didn't have the opportunities... Its true gift will shine through because it will meet the needs of the person who receives it."

Pistell continually defied people's expectations of her, living a life rich in learning, travel and friendship. Her legacy lives on through her friends, this book and the endowed fund at UVic that will help other students achieve their travel dreams. As Tamura puts it, "People come and go in our lives, but Donna was never forgotten." †

***Wings on my Wheels* is published by Five Friends Publishing and is available through Amazon.**

**Each student supported through the fund will receive a copy of the book.**

**Learn more about legacy giving at [uvic.ca/giftinwill](https://uvic.ca/giftinwill)**

# Class Notes

## News and photos from around the alumni world

### 1960s

**DON STEVENS**, BSc '63, retired as full professor from the University of Guelph in 2014 but continues his active research program in comparative physiology at the Atlantic Veterinary College, University of Prince Edward Island.

### 1970s

**RHODA TAYLOR**, BA '76, MPH '14, has been awarded the BC Good Citizenship medal. Taylor, who lives in Duncan, has spent 30 years as an executive board member of Volunteer Cowichan. She helps sponsor refugees with the Cowichan Intercultural Society and raises funds to help families get settled in the area.

### 1980s

In November, celebrated Canadian short story writer and UVic Humanities grad **MARK**

**ANTHONY JARMAN**, BA '80, released *Burn Man: Selected Stories* (Biblioasis). The anthology spans Jarman's four-decade career and



landed on the *New York Times* '9 New Books We Recommend this Week' list. NYT book reviewer

Lincoln Michel wrote: "Anyone who enjoys poetry in prose, who feels enlivened by language and struck by sentences, will find much to admire in *Burn Man*. Jarman's stories are full of violence, tragedy and mistakes. Yet there's plenty of humour and heart

too [...] *Burn Man* left me seeing a bit more beauty in our hurting-heart world."

Jarman, who once taught at UVic, is now at the University of New Brunswick, where he has been fiction editor of *The Fiddlehead* literary journal since 1999. He published a travel book, *Touch Anywhere to Begin*, in 2022.



**FRANKE JAMES with her sister, Teresa.**

Fine Arts grad **FRANKE JAMES**, MFA '81, recently published her fourth book, *Freeing Teresa: A True Story about Fighting Ableism*. The book details James's efforts to help her younger sister, who has Down Syndrome, get out of a nursing home and regain her decision-making rights. More information at [freeingteresa.com](http://freeingteresa.com).

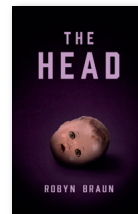
**BRITTA GUNDERSEN-BRYDEN**, MEd '89, recently released *Ominous—An African Journey*. This compelling account propels readers through dangers real and perceived, wildlife encounters, intercultural experiences and enduring personal relationships developed during the author's three years as a World University Service of Canada teacher in rural

Zimbabwe. Gundersen-Bryden's work has appeared in *BC History Magazine*, *Island Writer*, Quebec City's *Chronicle-Telegraph* and the quarterly publications of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec and the Victoria Historical Society. *Ominous* is her first full-length book.

As one of the most decorated coaches in Canadian university sport history, **LYNNE "Buzz" BEECROFT**, BA '82, MEd '94, amassed 34 national medals (15 of which are gold), coached nearly 40 athletes who have gone on to represent Canada and over 70 All-Canadians, finishing with an impressive overall coaching record of 340–98–89 (wins-losses-ties). This past fall, UVic's Department of Athletics and Recreation officially named the CARSA field hockey pitch after her, commemorating the legendary Vikes coach and Distinguished Alumni Award recipient.

### 1990s

Acclaimed Kwagwalth/Stó:lō opera singer, CBC Radio host and Distinguished Alumni Award recipient **MARION NEWMAN**, BMus '93, is the newest faculty member at UVic's School of Music. "It's always a lovely circular journey when alumni return and become part of the faculty," says Newman. Currently based in Toronto, Newman will officially join the department as an assistant professor on July 1 but will continue hosting CBC's popular *Saturday Afternoon at the Opera* show from Victoria.



**ROBYN BRAUN**, BA '90, has published her first novella, *The Head*, with Enfield and Wizey press.

Described as "a bizarre journey through trauma, bad relationships and toxic workplace culture," *The Head* unpacks the tale of a math professor who discovers a disembodied but living infant head on her dresser. Braun is an assistant lecturer in communications and composition in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at University of Alberta's School of Mining and Petroleum Engineering.

**MICHELLE DAVIS**, Cert. '95, BA '98, is the CEO of the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition (ONLC), a provincial support organization focusing on Indigenous adult literacy. A new division of ONLC, Turtle's Back Publishing (TBP), has just published *Blood Sport*, which is a satirical play that looks at "Pretend Indians." Launched in 2020, TBP has already won an international book award for *Akhwatsirehko:wa My Big Family* and received an honourable mention for *In Memory of Feast: Memories of Residential School Survivors*. TBP publishes only Indigenous works. More info at [onlc.ca](http://onlc.ca).

**AJ DOLMAN**, BA '99, has published their first full-length collection of poetry, *Crazy / Mad* (Gordon Hill Press). Dolman is a poet, author and bi+ rights advocate living in Ottawa.





**AJ DOLMAN**

UVic Law alumnus the Honourable Chief Justice **LEONARD MARCHAND**, JD '94, was appointed Chief Justice of British Columbia and Chief Justice of the Court of Appeal of Yukon.

He was appointed to the Supreme Court of British Columbia in 2017 and to the Court of Appeal for British Columbia in 2021. Before his appointment to the Supreme Court of BC, Chief Justice Marchand was a judge of the Provincial Court of British Columbia from 2013 to 2017. Chief Justice Marchand has dedicated a substantial portion of his career to achieving reconciliation for Indigenous Peoples, including by advancing civil claims on behalf of residential school Survivors. In 2005, he helped negotiate and was a signatory to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. Chief Justice Marchand is Syilx and a member of the Okanagan Indian Band. He grew up in Kamloops.

**MARY-ANNE NEAL**, MEd '99, has been honoured by Leadership Victoria with an award for her contributions to lifelong learning. Neal is semi-retired, although she still teaches Environmental Justice and supervises graduate students

who are earning an MA in Global Leadership at Royal Roads University in Victoria. She also continues to volunteer overseas in the global south and in the far north of Canada for Catalyste +, a Canadian economic development organization dedicated to strengthening local communities by addressing development challenges.



**ESI EDUGYAN**

Writing alum and literary superstar **ESI EDUGYAN**, BA '99, published her first children's book, *Garden of Lost Socks*, and chaired the judging of the 2023 Booker Prize. Edugyan is a two-time winner of the Giller Prize for her novels *Half-Blood Blues* and *Washington Black*.

## 2000s

UVic alumna **DANYA FAST**, BA '05, has published a new book on the toxic drug poisoning crisis



**DANYA FAST**

that spans 15 years of fieldwork with youth in Vancouver. *The Best Place: Addiction, Intervention, and Living and Dying Young in Vancouver* was researched by following a



group of young people in Vancouver who use drugs. The book, from UBC Press, presents new ways to think about how to support youth with substance-use issues.

"I hope that the book not only humanizes young people who use drugs, but also puts faces to the overdose emergency itself. We've lost so many young people under 29 years of age. I hope this book illustrates how devastating this crisis has been and continues to be," said Fast in an interview with UBC. Fast is an assistant professor at UBC's department of medicine and a research scientist at the BC Centre on Substance Use.

Double grad **PATRICK GRACE**, BA '09, MA '11, recently released his first book of poetry, titled *Deviant*. The collection, published by University of Alberta Press, touches on queer themes of sexuality and coming-of-age. Grace is now an elementary school teacher in French Immersion.

UVic Business alumna **ERINN PINKERTON** received the 2024 Award of Distinction from the Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce. Pinkerton, BCom '01, is the first female president and CEO of BC Transit, leading the delivery of transit for more than 130 communities in BC. She is known as a visionary leader who is modernizing public transit

through innovation and technology, including transitioning BC Transit's entire fleet to zero-emission vehicles by 2040.



**ERINN PINKERTON**

**ROBIN MAZUMDER**, BSc '08, who appeared on the cover of the fall 2021 issue of the *Torch*, now lives in Berlin, working as a collaborator on Research Platform Neurourbanism, a transdisciplinary and multi-institution research initiative aimed at understanding how urban design impacts mental health. Mazumder gave the McMaster University 2023 Zeidler-Evans Architecture of Health Lecture, which was turned into an episode of CBC Ideas. He travelled to Cluj Napoca, Romania to give the keynote address at the Mathias Corvinus Collegium Urban Development Conference. Meanwhile, he continues to work on his book. "The Architecture of Health Lecture really helped me structure a story to build on. It's exciting," he says.

Congratulations to Hong Kong-based UVic alumnus **KEVIN ORR**, BA '02, on an exciting leadership appointment in international health. Orr was elected as the new Board of Director of the International Federation on Ageing (IFA), serving a term until 2027. As a



**KEVIN ORR**

board member of an international organization, he provides public-health expertise and experience to IFA and advocates for relevant aging policies for Asian countries and worldwide.

Orr is VP and Chief Investment Officer of Winner Medical Group, a leading Chinese brand manufacturer, distributor and retailer of medical devices and consumer health products for mainland Greater China, Hong Kong and worldwide. Orr was named a United Nations SDG (Sustainability Development Goals) Pioneer of China in 2020. He also received a UVic Distinguished Alumni Award in 2019.

UVic Business grad **NATHAN FIELDER**, BCom '05, received much critical acclaim this year for his uncomfortable and groundbreaking drama series *The Curse*,



**Business grad NATHAN FIELDER stars alongside Emma Stone in the critically acclaimed TV series *The Curse*.**

starring Fielder, Emma Stone and Benny Safdie. Fielder was also named one of *TIME* Magazine's most influential people of 2023.

Leading man **MARK CHAO**, BCom '07, starred as a cardiologist in the new Mandarin-language drama *The Heart*, which earned him a nomination at the Macau International TV Festival.

## 2010s

UVic grad **USMAN KHAN**, PhD in Mechanical Engineering '16, has been appointed Chair of the Department of Civil Engineering at York University.

Writing alum **KYEREN REGEHR**, BFA '11, MFA '13, is the new director of Victoria's venerable Planet Earth Poetry Reading Series, which, at 28 years, is possibly the city's longest-running continuous literary series.

**RACHEL KRATOFIL**, BSc '15, won a Science & SciLifeLab Prize for Young Scientists in the Cell and Molecular Biology category. Kratofil also earned a PhD in 2022 from the University of Calgary and is a Helen Hay Whitney Postdoctoral Fellow at NYU Grossman School of Medicine in the lab of Dr. Shruti Naik.

UVic alumnus **JAMES GATSI**, BA '18, was named Chamber Member of the Year for 2024 by the Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce. Gatsi is the founder and CEO of CL Web Developers Inc. He was elected to the Chamber's Board of Directors in 2022, and serves as Vice Chair on the Inclusion, Diversity and

Equity Advancement Committee as well as the board liaison for the Emerge Committee. Gatsi is also a board member of the UVic Alumni Association.

**KAYLEEN VANDERREE**, BA '16, and her partner, Canadian Paralympic Team gold medalist Tyler Turner, finished second overall in season nine of *Amazing Race Canada*. VanderRee played four seasons of varsity field hockey with the UVic Vikes and was known for documenting her incredible adventures with her travelling cats Bolt and Keel (now on Instagram as @adventrapets).

Writing grad **DONNA KANE**, BA '10, has published a new book of poetry. *Asterisms* (Harbour Publishing) is billed as an eclectic collection of poems that celebrates the universe and the natural world of which we are all a part. Kane is the recipient of the Aurora Award of Distinction: Arts and Culture, and the British Columbia Medal of Good Citizenship. Her poems, short fiction, reviews and essays have been published widely. She is the author of the non-fiction book *Summer of the Horse* (2018), and of three books of poetry—most recently *Orrery*, a finalist for the 2020 Governor General's Literary Award. She divides her time between Rolla, BC and Halifax, NS.

## 2020s

In the summer of 2016, UVic Writing grad **MARTIN BAUMAN**, MFA '21, pedalled across Canada to raise funds for community mental-health services. That journey became

the basis of his new travel memoir, *Hell of a Ride* (Pottersfield Press). The winner of the Pottersfield Prize for Creative Nonfiction, *Hell of a Ride* is described as "a coming-of-age tale of a family's journey through trauma and mental illness, a son's love for his father, and the 7,000-kilometre solo bicycle voyage across Canada that brought it all to the forefront."

Bauman wrote about his cycling trip for a "Vox Alumni" column in the fall 2022 edition of *Torch* magazine.



**MARTIN BAUMAN**

UVic grad **INGRID HAUSS**, MEd '20, has a new book: *Toward Renewal and Belonging: Art, Movement, and Community*. The book is spiritually rooted, somatically based, pedagogically applied and artistically expressed, says Hauss. "The book is full of my art and offers a lively look at my interdisciplinary studio practice involving writing, drawing, painting, movement and inter-arts-performance through which I model rather than teach my creative approach." 🎨

### What's New With You?

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



## Farewells

**RICHARD STEVENSON** passed away in Victoria, BC on Oct. 18, 2023, surrounded by his loved ones and while his favourite jazz albums played. Rick is survived by his wife of 43 years, Gepke (née Polet); his children Christian, Marika and Adrian (Amanda); his grandson Remy; and his siblings Larry (Sherry), Donna and Debbie, as well as nieces, nephews, inlaws and cousins.



**RICHARD STEVENSON**

For the majority of his life, Rick was a dedicated and accomplished writer, publishing more than 40 works of poetry, haiku and fiction, not to mention five forthcoming titles. Rick graduated with an Honours BA in English from the UVic, and an MFA in Creative Writing from UBC. He was proud to become an educator himself. Throughout his 30-year career teaching English, Canadian Literature and Creative Writing at Lethbridge College, he helped many new and established writers find their voice.

Given his enormous circle of friends, two celebrations of Rick's life will be held in spring/summer

of 2024, one in Lethbridge, AB and one on Vancouver Island. For more information, visit the Pacific Coast Cremations website at [pacificcoastcremation.com/richard-william-stevenson](http://pacificcoastcremation.com/richard-william-stevenson).

**Dr. LAURENCE (Larry) DEVLIN** died peacefully in his sleep early in the morning of June 3, 2023, at the age of 82. Born in Powell River, BC, Larry attended Victoria College and then the University of Victoria where he completed an undergraduate degree in education. While at UVic, Larry was elected the university's first student council president. Larry was awarded a Kellogg Fellowship to the University of Chicago where he went on to complete his PhD in the field of Adult Education before returning to Victoria as the first department head of what is now the Division of Continuing Studies. In addition to his administrative role, Larry taught a number of post-graduate classes and advised several Masters and PhD candidates. After retiring from UVic in 1997, Larry revived his passion and love for the piano.

**OLIVIA R. BARR** passed away on Nov. 25, 2023. Olivia was the University of Victoria's second student council president and first woman to hold that position. She was also the first female student society president elected at a co-ed Canadian university. While serving as president, Barr gave birth to her son, Douglas, as noted in a front-page story in the *Martlet* student newspaper, dated

Oct. 15, 1964. With the accompanying headline "Baby Barr receives booming welcome," the article noted that it was the first time someone in that role had given birth while in office, and to commemorate the occasion a 21-gun salute was fired outside the Student Union Building. According to the story, "It was fired from a brass cannon lent to the *Martlet* by Island Tug and Barge."

Olivia is survived by her son Douglas Barr and his husband Seumas Gagne, her sister Victoria Rorke, cousins Mary Harlan, Alice Blumer and Sandy Pratt, and friends from around the world.

**JIM BIGSBY** died January 21, 2024 at the age of 80. While attending UVic, he was active in student politics and served as editor of the *Martlet* student newspaper and the *Tower* yearbook. When the Beatles played Vancouver in 1964, Jim was working for a Victoria newspaper and spent the concert photographing the band from in front of the barricades. After graduating from UVic, he received a master's degree from SFU. He went on to a successful and varied career, a serial entrepreneur and consultant specializing in learning materials and communications. Jim's love of music led to him singing in several Victoria choirs (notably Allegra and Arbutus Singers) and becoming the choir director and music arranger for the Goward House Singers, which he led for 13 years before retiring five years ago.

Jim is survived by his wife Suzanne; his siblings Stephen and Gail; his children David and Caitlin (through his first wife Kathleen); his daughter-in-law Katy; his grandchildren Connery, Marshall, Elliot, Ella and Ash; and his dog Pippi.

The Honourable **IONA CAMPAGNOLO**, O.C., O.B.C., who received an Honorary Doctorate of Laws from the university in 2007, passed away in April at the age of 91. Iona, a former politician, was the first woman to be appointed BC's lieutenant-governor and is remembered as a trailblazer, known for her commitment to gender equality, climate action and reconciliation.

**RICHARD (Dick) CHUDLEY** died Aug. 5, 2023 at the age of 87. In 1957, Dick immigrated to Canada from England, putting down stakes in Victoria, where he worked in the Naval Reserve aboard the *HMS Malahat* from 1960–1971 and was the first manager/proctor of newly constructed Student Union Building at the University of Victoria.

An avid boater, he was never happier than when cruising the Gulf Islands with his first mate, family and friends on board. Dick's favourite quote, which he lived out, came from *The Wind in the Willows*: "Believe me my young friend, there is nothing—absolutely nothing—half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats." 🛶

# Now Boarding

UVic social work alumna and debut author **Amy Mattes, BSW '17**, writes about the enduring joy of skateboarding and why kickflips might help kick-start creativity.

BY AMY MATTES, BSW '17



**AMY MATTES** hopes to share her love of skateboarding with her young son, River.

**A**t the age of 42, I still love the feeling of falling and getting dirty on a skateboard. I'm more cautious and prone to injury nowadays, and I spend more time aiding my young son in not giving up on the task of learning, even though it can be difficult and painful. There is something about the grit, the feeling of pushing and coasting through public spaces, that alleviates the harsh edges of the world and expands freedom and self-expression.

Skateboarding helped me survive a rough adolescence in Nelson, BC, and later Montreal. It formed the basis for my newly released debut novel, *Late September*, and it was my surprising path to studying social work at UVic. The play and comradery of skateboarding brings together all kinds of people throughout the life span, developing self-concept, confidence and community. It also spawns creativity, much of which is emulated through today's fashion, music and media arts. Skateboarding is an artform and an Olympic sport. It is anti-conformist and community building. Many people involved are creatives and helpers.

The summer I was 33, I taught skateboarding lessons on Victoria's West Shore as a part-time gig. During a lesson, a group of kids singled out a child and teased them for looking like a boy. I went to intervene, but they shrugged off the concern. "I

want to be a boy," they had said. There was joy and conviction in their smile, like they knew something I didn't, and I trusted them.

I'd been a girl in male-dominated sports my whole life and was no stranger to bullying or questioning one's identity. I was so proud of this child for knowing who they were. I gave them my skateboard that day as they didn't have their own. Skateboards were easy to come by for me, and I hoped the board would last for them, help them in the way it had me. At that time, I was desperate to leave my waitressing job behind. I began thinking about community, bodies, choices and safety. I had wanted to go back to school but had little idea of what I was good at or interested in, until I realized I'd been performing and experiencing social services work for all of my life.

At 34, as a mature student, I enrolled in social work at UVic, the first person in my family to go to university. There, my values became politics and my purpose and passion ignited. I was always journaling my experiences with addiction, sexuality, grief and identity—and academics only bolstered my wisdom. Academic life did put my dream of authoring a novel on hold for four years, but I've finally accomplished it! The themes I explore in my novel are those of lived experience. The premise is a girl skateboarder coming-of-age on a journey to a new city, where self-esteem is learned the hard way and loving oneself unfolds through trial and error. Having realized some of my own dreams, I now use the teachings of my degree to work as a probation officer, helping others to achieve their full potential. †

**Amy Mattes lives, writes and co-parents in Nanaimo, where she is working on a new book. Her debut novel, *Late September*, is available through Nightwood Editions. She will always love skateboarding and the skateboarding community.**





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## OFF CAMPUS



PHOTO: MICHAEL KISSINGER

## Water Works

A figure strolls down the boat launch at Protection Island, where water vessels of all sorts lie ready for a day of adventure or work on the water. **MICHAEL KISSINGER**, BEd '94, photographed this coastal scene across from Nanaimo's downtown harbour.