

THE UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA ALUMNI MAGAZINE

SPRING 2025

UVIC TORCH



Trip Essentials

We explore the value and meaning of travel with alumni who work in related fields, such as Tamara Vrooman, President and CEO of YVR.



CLOSE UP

View to a Thrill

The UVic Vikes men's basketball team are the 2024–25 U SPORTS champions after a decisive and emotional win over the Calgary Dinos March 16 at UBC's Thunderbird Sports Centre in Vancouver.

The path to gold wasn't easy. The Vikes had to tough it out to earn a berth at nationals after a home-game loss to the Dinos during the Canada West semi-final left their dreams in doubt. It marks the first U SPORTS Final 8 title for the Vikes men's hoops team in 28 years!

Pictured: UVic Vikes guard **RENOLDO ROBINSON** soars past two Calgary Dinos. He made 24 points in the gold-medal game, which UVic won 82–53.

Credit: Rich Lam/UBC Thunderbirds





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Saké expert and importer **PATRICK ELLIS**.

Work Journey

The job-search process can be challenging, but being intentional and using artificial intelligence (AI) as a tool can help, according to alumni career educator **Kerry Vaughan**.

BY JENNY MANZER, BA '97

For this issue, *Trip Essentials*, we spoke with alumni in travel-related industries, including John Wensveen, president of the International Space University. Wensveen embraced the idea of using “reverse engineering” to accomplish a goal. Put another way, you figure out where you want to be and go backwards to find the steps to get there, while acknowledging there might be off-ramps along the way.

Alumni career educator Kerry Vaughan specializes in helping UVic grads work toward reaching goals. She, too, supports the notion of mapping out a plan and taking intentional steps, even if the progress might seem slow. She is upfront about the reality that, depending on where you live, your chosen field and your experience, the job search might be tough right now—and that can take a toll on mental health.

Applying for too many jobs at once is a common mistake, she says. Sometimes, an eager alum has fanned out with dozens of queries and resumés. Her advice might be to slow down, reassess and reconsider to make sure applications are customized. “So, really just pausing, thinking about what you’re doing that’s working for you and what isn’t.”

Job seekers might need to take work not directly in their field to get by. In this case, she suggests trying to find something “adjacent” or with skills that might transfer. Volunteer work can develop skills and contacts that push your application into the “yes” pile. The job-search journey can be long—so celebrate the wins, however



Alumni career educator **KERRY VAUGHAN**.

small, whether it’s being selected for an interview or earning a new credential.

When crafting a resumé, Vaughan suggests framing work responsibilities as achievements. An applicant might write that they increased engagement by a certain percentage, rather than the summary “responsible for marketing emails.”

Artificial intelligence is profoundly changing the job search. Submissions are often vetted in an Applicant Tracking System or ATS—so resumés must be scannable. Vaughan advises running a job description through an AI program to deconstruct it. So, put a job posting in a program like

ChatGPT with a prompt such as “identify the top or the most important skills, competencies and qualifications required for this role,” she says. AI can also be used to generate potential questions for a mock job interview.

Despite the advances of AI, people are still at the core of the job search. A key part of Vaughan’s work is helping job searchers build a professional network. Brief informational interviews with people working in a field are a great way to access the “hidden” job market, or the large percentage of positions that are not posted.

Supports, like weekly job clubs or services such as Work BC, can be helpful—as well as the workshops and assistance offered to UVic alumni through career services. Being intentional in your search doesn’t always lead to landing a dream job in your field right away. It could mean making steady progress on building skills, confidence and relationships.

John Wensveen, for example, started at an airline in a junior role that included wearing the company’s mascot costume. The connections he made there, along with the mentorship of a supportive CEO, helped him—step by step—eventually fulfill his dream of working in aviation. ↑

Find information about alumni career support at uvic.ca/career-services/info-for/alumni.

TORCH



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The Essentials of the Journey

Travel changes us—and so does education. Both are lifelong pursuits that prepare us to engage deeply with the world.

BY KEVIN HALL, PHD, PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR



“... in a world that often feels uncertain, the ability to travel with curiosity, humility and respect may be one of the most important skills we can offer the next generation of learners.”

Each year, thousands of people visit or attend the University of Victoria on a journey—some from down the road, others from across the globe. What they carry with them, along with a suitcase or backpack, are their curiosity, hopes and a desire to better themselves and our world.

Travel and education are both about transformation. They expand our perspectives, unsettle assumptions and challenge us to listen more deeply. This issue of *Torch* reminds us that education does not only happen in labs and classrooms—it happens in the spaces between, the places that are unfamiliar and help us to grow stronger as we explore.

UVic is proud to support a growing number of international co-op programs, field schools and global learning experiences. Whether our students are interning at start-ups in Germany, working on sustainability projects in Chile, or studying law in a transnational setting, they are gaining more than academic credit—they are learning how to navigate difference with empathy and insight.

Our alumni carry this global mindset with them wherever they go. We constantly see how a UVic education continues to inspire lifelong learning and cross-border collaboration long after graduation. Whether working in Indigenous governance in New Zealand, building climate resilience in East Africa, or researching ocean health across Pacific coastlines, these grads embody what it means to think and act globally.

Our strategic plan, *Distinctly UVic*, names “People, Place and Planet” as an institutional core priority. That commitment to the planet also means deepening our understanding of place and how we relate to others, which is why a big focus of UVic’s global engagement strategy, and the work of leaders like Dr. A.R. (Elango) Elangovan, is on Transnational Education (TNE).

Elango shares that “TNE involves offering our programs in other countries by partnering with reputed local universities so as to create the conditions for an extraordinary shared transformation for all those involved. It inspires us as a university to adapt and elevate our scholarship and programs to serve a global audience in places they call home, it invites our partner universities to engage with us in an equal and mutually respectful collaboration to imagine new ways to learn and grow, and it offers students in those countries an opportunity to accommodate cultural, financial and family-related constraints in their quest for quality education. In its own way, TNE nudges all of us to ‘travel’ away from our comfort zones, old habits and sticky constraints and embrace new possibilities.”

Education should be portable. Knowledge that we shape and sculpt and share widely with influences outside our local known circles is the most potent. Just as we travel to learn, we also learn that travel allows us to offer fresh ideas and soak up unique perspectives in equal measure. It happens subconsciously all the time but is far more powerful when we are in a mindset to learn while abroad. And in a world that often feels uncertain, the ability to travel with curiosity, humility and respect may be one of the most important skills we can offer the next generation of learners.

If travel teaches us to be better listeners, better neighbours and better stewards of our shared future, then we should see it as essential, not optional. That’s why I believe education should be lifelong, and travel should be too. To our alumni reading this across many time zones—thank you for continuing the journey and for carrying UVic with you wherever you go.†

A Healthy Change

Speech pathologist and change maker **Tammy Hopper** serves as dean of UVic's new Faculty of Health.

BY STEPHANIE HARRINGTON, MFA '17



TAMMY HOPPER is the dean of UVic's new Faculty of Health.

When Tammy Hopper was eight years old, a speech-language pathologist visited her rural community of The Pas, on Treaty 5 territory, in northern Manitoba.

At the time, Hopper had a speech impairment, a lateral lisp, that affected people's ability to understand her. Besides helping with her speech, that early experience with the speech-language pathologist shaped Hopper's perception of what she could do when she grew up.

"I always think about how that influenced my life," Hopper says.

In her high school yearbook, Hopper wrote that she wanted to be a physical therapist. But while studying American Sign Language during her undergraduate degree in Winnipeg, Hopper met a friend who was going into speech-language therapy. It piqued her interest again. "I thought—I want to do that," Hopper says.

NEW DEAN, NEW FACULTY

In May, Hopper joined the University of Victoria as the inaugural dean of the Faculty of Health—UVic's first new faculty in 30 years. The Faculty of Health builds on UVic's strengths over the past five decades in health and wellness programs, including nursing, health information science, social work, public health and social policy, clinical psychology, exercise science and neuroscience.

With more than more than 200 faculty members working in health and wellness on campus, the Faculty of Health will help

address healthcare challenges locally and nationally by bringing together expertise across UVic—through expanded research, academic programs and new and broadened partnership opportunities.

"I'm so optimistic about the new Faculty of Health—its establishment and its future," she says.

Hopper joins UVic from the University of Alberta's Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine, where she has served as dean since 2021. Over her more than 20 years at U of A, Hopper has served as a professor, scholar and mentor to a significant number of graduate students. During her tenure, she also served as Vice Provost, Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) for four years.

One of the things she loves about being a dean is developing new relationships in meaningful ways and working together to achieve a collective vision for the faculty.

A longstanding advocate for equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) initiatives and Indigenous engagement, Hopper was drawn to UVic's commitment to EDI and Indigenization and decolonization. She says the Indigenous Wellness Engagement Group, established to advance Indigenous wellness in education, practice and research in the health faculty, shows UVic's commitment to the purpose, pledge and principles articulated in its strategic plan, *Distinctly UVic*.

Hopper is a change maker. In her time as a dean at U of A, she participated in the Black Academic Excellence Cohort Hire Initiative, expanded program enrolment to rural Alberta students,

and developed a Memorandum of Relational Understanding with Treaty 8 First Nations in Alberta.

In June last year, Hopper's faculty implemented a new EDI Teaching & Learning Impact Framework to provide a common language and understanding of what EDI impact means in teaching and learning.

"When we create a diverse student cohort, ensure the sharing of Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing, and foster inclusion and belonging, the learning context is enriched in ways that students take with them and ultimately infuse in their practice and future work environments," Hopper says.

She says measuring impact of EDI initiatives is complex but necessary if institutions want to make lasting change in the lives of the people they serve. "Impact is about that 'So, what?,' the difference that we make for the people we serve. That's what we're after, for a positive influence in the health and well-being of our communities through the faculty's work in teaching and learning, as well as research and service."

Leadership, for Hopper, is a service role. She emphasizes that her successes at U of A came from the combined efforts of her leadership team, faculty members and staff.

"Everything we've done, we've done together," she says. "[As dean], you're working in the service of the people you're leading. I believe that my role is to facilitate the work of others, to ensure that we can reach our goals and have the impact we envision."

RESEARCH CAREER

After she graduated from the University of Manitoba with a psychology degree, Hopper headed south to study, completing a MSc in speech pathology in 1993 at Idaho State University.

"I fell in love with the field—and I also fell in love with research when I completed my master's thesis," Hopper says.

She started working as a speech-language pathologist in long-term care. Over those four years, Hopper realized there was a lack of evidence-based treatments and management techniques for older adults living with degenerative conditions, most commonly dementia caused by Alzheimer's disease.

She started a PhD in Speech and Hearing Sciences at the University of Arizona, focusing on improving communication for people with dementia and their care partners. After graduating in 2000, Hopper completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Arizona's National Centre for Neurogenic Communication Disorders.

When Hopper returned to Canada to start a tenure-track position at U of A in 2001, her favourite part of the job was what she calls the "creative endeavour of research." She secured

multiple research grants from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and other organizations. She published extensively in top journals, including the *British Medical Journal* and the *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*.

"I've always had a lot of questions about how change happens, especially behaviour change in the rehabilitation process," she says. "And also [I've enjoyed] connecting with people to find out what it is that they want to be able to fully participate in their life."

No one, then, was more surprised than Hopper by her move into administration. When an opportunity came up for Hopper to step into an acting leadership position, she took it.

"Certainly, it was unexpected, but I did have strong mentors who guided me in seeing how these leadership roles could be shaped to uplift others, and that appealed to me."

LOOKING FORWARD

The first group of students admitted into the health faculty started in May. Like Hopper, many students are becoming acquainted with a new city, new institution and new people.

So, what's next for UVic's newest faculty? Hopper is careful about being too prescriptive when it comes to articulating a vision. Listening and collaborating with existing health schools and programs is at the top of her mind.

"I want to continue to build on the strengths that currently exist in academic programs and research," she says.

Conversations are underway at UVic to develop new programs with an interdisciplinary focus as well as to expand enrolment in high-demand programs. And Hopper sees potential in creating a diverse range of options, such as micro-credentials and non-credit courses to offer more flexible options for learners at different points of their careers. She also sees opportunities for strategic investment to support research excellence, consistent with Aspiration 2030, UVic's Research and Creative Works Strategy.

For now, she is excited to settle into her new surroundings and immerse herself in the beauty of the Island and ɫəʔəŋən territory. She's a long way from The Pas where she grew up, but Hopper will bring with her the same sense of curiosity and openness that has guided her since childhood.

"I am honoured to be the new dean of the Faculty of Health and am looking forward to collaborating with students, faculty and staff across the university, as we embark on this next phase of the faculty's development." ¶

Welcome aboard the **Trip Essentials** issue, as we explore the value and meaning of travel through the lens of notable UVic alumni who work in related industries. From guides, writers, researchers and photographers, to experts in aviation and entrepreneurship, we profile UVic grads who show us that, as Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Life is a journey, not a destination.”



Beyond the Numbers

UVic History alumna Tamara Vrooman, President and CEO of YVR, has earned national acclaim as a gifted, compassionate leader who can navigate organizations through turbulent times to produce a stronger, more resilient organization better able to serve its own people and society.

BY JENNY MANZER, BA '97 • PHOTO BY JIMMY JEONG



or someone who is heralded as a brilliant motivator and mentor, who broke down barriers in BC's civil service as deputy finance minister, who led Canada's biggest credit union through a recession, then took the reins of the Vancouver International Airport (YVR) right before a global pandemic fell like a heavy, wet curtain, it is surprising to learn that Tamara Vrooman did not always have a knack for numbers. That skill came later.

"I actually always had a way with words, and to me math is just a language. It's actually the universal language because it's one that we can all speak. It's got component parts, it goes together, you make things."

Speaking from her office at YVR, where she serves as President and CEO, Vrooman says once she realized math was "really just a language," it opened up a whole new world.

That world has been expansive. Vrooman earned two history degrees at UVic, a BA in 1991 and an MA in 1995, an experience she loved, then entered the work force in the civil service. Finding her career track stalled, she returned to UVic to sharpen her skills in math and statistics. After that, there was no stopping her ascent, which former colleague Carole Taylor described as "meteoric" in the nomination for Vrooman's Distinguished Alumni Award, which she received in 2011.

In supporting the nomination, Taylor wrote that Vrooman's academic background in history "provided her with a unique perspective on dealing with issues of policy and financial affairs; [she] is able to look beyond the numbers."

When Taylor was BC's finance minister from 2004 to 2007, Vrooman served as her deputy finance minister, the first female to hold the position and the first to take maternity leave. Vrooman was aware of these ceilings, but says her approach was to do what she could to eliminate them and hopefully clear a path for those who followed.

"I was a bit naïve, frankly, I had always admired the women who had come before me, but you know when you are looking at people who are advanced in their career, they always make it look so easy, but of course then you learn—it's really not that easy."

Easy has not been the overriding characteristic of Vrooman's path. Soon after becoming CEO of Vancity Credit Union in 2007, she found herself steering it through a recession. "I always joke

'You should probably know where I'm going next before I go there,'" says Vrooman, alluding to the fact that she took over at YVR just as the global pandemic closed borders and parked planes.

TAKING THE TOUGH ASSIGNMENTS

"But with some seriousness, I would say I do believe in the cliché that a crisis is a terrible thing to waste. Sometimes when we're forced to look at what really matters and what doesn't, we actually make better decisions. We can test ourselves. We can learn. We can share more quickly. I don't necessarily always sign up for the tough assignments or look for them, but I think they sort of find me, if I could put it that way."

Under Vrooman, Vancity not only survived but thrived. The credit union became a carbon-neutral financial institution and a living-wage employer. She is known as someone who does not back away from a challenge when an organization needs a pilot during a storm.

"I do find I've gotten some skill, I guess I would say, in being able to navigate them in a way that builds the confidence of the organization, builds its performance, builds its resilience—that's what leadership should do, leave it better than you found it."

Vrooman believes her background in history and her applied skills in math and statistics have all been integral in preparing her for these challenges. "I think education is just like other essential parts of our life. Balance is really important. So just like we don't only eat one kind of food, I hope, or we don't only do one kind of exercise, we need to expose ourselves to different ways of knowing, learning, debating, creating, communicating."

She is well aware that many creative business minds, such as Apple founder Steve Jobs, or UVic Philosophy alumnus Stewart Butterfield of Slack, studied liberal arts as part of their springboard to success. "So, I love the left-brain right-brain thing. I always encourage young people if they're passionate about science to take a philosophy or literature course. If they're passionate about language, French, say, take a computer-science course so that you get the balance. Because of course, when you finish, life does need both of those skills."

WEALTH, WELL-BEING AND THE FUTURE

Her ability to see the big picture helped her perceive that decisions such as allocation of capital—who gets a loan and who doesn't—determines not just the future of individuals, but the kind of society we create.

"If we're not measuring the real outcomes of what we're doing when we're applying the tools of finance, when we're applying the modes of transportation and aviation and logistics and data and connectivity, then it's a false measure to say that

only money, time, quantifiable things are the true measure of success,” she says.

“How do we do the hard work to talk about the outcomes that actually matter? We don’t allocate money for money’s sake. We allocate money to create wealth and opportunity. Wealth in the true sense of that word: well-being, independence, health, longevity, future. We need to be able to measure those things to make sure the allocations of the more concrete things are going in the right direction.”

At Vancity, a cooperative with a “one member, one vote” democratic model, this idea resonated. The team had to communicate results to membership in ways that didn’t sacrifice financial gains or service expectations but showed them making a meaningful difference in people’s lives.

Vrooman has been at YVR for five years now. In her estimation, they didn’t just get through the pandemic but came out “much, much stronger.” The airport is situated on a flood plain, on a major river, next to the ocean. They can’t afford to ignore climate realities. “In a time when many companies and organizations are moving away from these commitments, we’ve doubled down on commitments to be net-zero by 2030. We believe that it allows us to manage those risks, the risks of climate change.”

YVR is also the first airport to digitize and use data across the board. It’s a big operation, with 27,000 people working there, so the ability to see and share data to identify risks and opportunities is essential. On the service side, YVR has had strong financials and was also voted as the Best Airport in North America for a record 14th time. Those votes are from individual passengers, validating that YVR is meeting the diverse needs of the 26-million people who travel through the airport, she says.

PLACE OF CONNECTION

Vrooman stresses that, at its core, an airport is about people engaging with other people.

“An airport is ultimately a place of connection. We often forget that. There’s a lot of machinery and equipment and data and security and infrastructure and regulation that goes into something like an aviation hub, but ultimately, it’s also a place of people.

She says people have told her stories of arriving at the airport as refugees, and knowing they were safe in their new home. “Or the place where they met their grandmother who came for the first time to see them, or the first time they went to university and travelled on their own or, or, or... it’s actually quite an emotional place.”

YVR is a living-wage employer at a time when the people who do the frontline jobs that keep the economy running are struggling.

“...I would say I do believe in the cliché that a crisis is a terrible thing to waste. Sometimes when we’re forced to look at what really matters and what doesn’t, we actually make better decisions. We can test ourselves. We can learn.”

gling. Vrooman is also particularly proud of The Paper Planes café, which provides work experience for young adults who are neurodiverse on the autism spectrum. There is a three-year waiting list to work there.

Vrooman’s acumen as a leader, and her ability, as Carole Taylor noted, to look “beyond the numbers,” has earned her many accolades, including the Queen’s Golden Jubilee Medal in 2003 for outstanding contributions to public service in BC, Canada’s Top 40 Under 40 in 2005, the YWCA Woman of Distinction Award in 2011 and the Order of BC in 2019, has been named the 2025 recipient of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce–Canadian Business Leader of the Year Award and as well as the UVic Distinguished Alumni Award.

Vrooman is currently chancellor of Simon Fraser University, and only recently wound up her time as head of the Canada Infrastructure Bank, a Crown corporation charged with supporting revenue-generating projects in the public interest. She also co-chairs a new B.C. Premier’s Trade and Economic Security Taskforce. The word “busy” does not seem strong enough to describe her schedule.

HOW SHE MAKES IT WORK

Vrooman has three non-negotiables that keep her fuelled and on her flight path: a supportive family, quality sleep and time to be truly unplugged.

“I’m very, very fortunate to have a supportive family. They keep me focused on what’s important. We have a saying in my household that my son and my husband will raise with me from time to time. They’ll remind me that I’m ‘not the CEO of everything.’” She can feel free sometimes to take a back seat and let others make a decision, which keeps her humble and grounded.

“The second thing is, if sleep were a recognizable professional attribute, it would be the Number One thing I would list

on my resumé. I'm a really good sleeper. I love my sleep. So, I make sure that I get it. I sleep my seven hours a day, no matter what, no matter where. Sleep and rest are important," she says.

The third non-negotiable is making her precious personal time count. "When I'm unplugged, I'm unplugged. And I make sure whatever I'm doing I try and be 100 per cent present in that, whether it's going to a dinner party with friends, going for a walk with my mom, or gardening or creating a playlist for a friend—I really try and be all in, and I find that helps."

Vrooman continues the journey of learning and striving. Of all the industries she has worked in, aviation is the most challenging. "This one is by far is the most complex. It's like eight industries in one. It's aviation and safety and infrastructure. But it's marketing, it's logistics, it's international trade, it's retail, it's health and wellness. We have paramedics and medical clinics. It's innovation, it's IT, it's data. It's cybersecurity. It's wildlife preservation and management. It's culture. It's language." It's vast and complex—and it works well, 99.9 per cent of the time, she notes.

Her own travel dreams put Japan at the top of her wish list. She has never visited, and is eager to experience the culture, the cities, the food and the nature. As a travel professional, her top tip is to prepare in advance. Know what you want to do, where you need to be, how you have to pack, what travel documents you need. "That makes the world of difference."

No matter how many times you've done it, travelling through an airport increases people's anxiety a little, so prepare. YVR made lots of investments recently on helping people navigate their trip with extra staff, technology, data supports and also with a \$30-million investment in CT scanners for Canadian Air Transport Authority (CATSA) screening.

UVIC A FOUNDATIONAL TIME

As for challenges on her horizon, Vrooman says there is still lots of work to do to promote inclusion—and she has a particular interest in the history of the suffragettes. As an 18-year-old history student, she was surprised to learn how recently women's voting rights were entrenched. "I remember the first time I read

about those women and I thought, wow who knew there was a time—I was quite naïve when I was 18—that women couldn't vote, that it would be that recent."

Vrooman is from Kamloops, so Victoria seemed like a bustling city to her then. She thrived during her time at UVic, where she met her spouse and many of her best friends. She has happy memories of nights socializing at Felicita's pub and of her part-time job working at the UVic Bookstore.


"The number of people who I met from different departments, different faculty working at the bookstore, I absolutely loved it. I have nothing but really great memories of UVic. It was a foundational part of my life. It gave me an opportunity to meet different people with different ideas, see things differently, challenge myself—everything that you'd want in an education."

Her undergraduate history thesis was on women in business-leadership positions at the turn of the century, building off of the suffragette movement. Despite all she has achieved, Vrooman is clear: there is more to do to improve society, and she will not sit on the sidelines.

"I tease my family that I think I'll be buried with my boots on. I plan to keep working until I'm no longer here on this planet. And I think there's so much more to do, not for me personally, just to make our communities more inclusive, to improve our ability to talk to one another, even though we have different points of view, to really think about the decisions we need to make to set our economic growth on a path that makes a difference. And people say to me all the time, 'You can do that from an airport?' And I say, 'Yeah.'"

Vrooman's notion that she'll keep serving throughout her life fits with the historical figure she would most liked to have met: Queen Elizabeth II. The Queen, who passed away in 2022 at age 96, was the first person that came to the mind of the double history grad.

"I think she was quite impressive and unique, obviously born into the situation she was born into, but I think particularly now that we look back, the way that she led and endured and provided stability in what must have been a very lonely, ultimately, role was admirable," she says. "I'd be curious to talk to her about what that was like." †



Guests exploring the Great Bear Rainforest on the expedition catamaran, *Cascadia*.

Canadian Beauty

Alumni Maureen Gordon and Kevin Smith are co-owners of Maple Leaf Adventures, a BC coastal-based adventure travel company. We asked them for top tips and insights on adventure travel in BC.

BY JENNY MANZER, BA '97

UVic alumni Maureen Gordon, BA in Creative Writing '94, and Kevin Smith, BA in Geography and Environmental Studies '96, are co-owners of Maple Leaf Adventures. The two have helped visitors tour BC and Alaska's coast for over 35 years and now have three vessels: the *Maple Leaf*, the *Swell* and the *Cascadia*—a sailing ship, tug-boat and catamaran. They lead visitors to places like Gwaii Haanas, a UNESCO World Heritage Site on Haida Gwaii, on

expedition cruises along 1,000 kilometres of wild coastline.

We asked Gordon and Smith for some top tips and insights on adventure travel in BC.

What are some of the main ways adventure travel has changed over the decades?

MG: When I first started working with Kevin in 2001, people I knew would look at me as if we were crazy to take people into the Great Bear Rainforest or Haida Gwaii by boat. Now, far more travellers

are interested in sustainable travel and locally guided experiences that are off the beaten track. And expedition cruising, which is adventure travel, not classic cruising, is one of fastest growing areas of interest in tourism. Also: Our guests are much more interested in the Indigenous culture than they were 15 years ago.

What should I consider if I want to minimize my environmental impact when I travel?

Ask yourself is the company that you're booking with actually doing positive work

to regenerate the area you're travelling? Will you be greeted as part of the mass-tourism problem by the locals or greeted with respect because your hosts are doing it right? Is the size of what you're participating in the proper scale for the place that you're in? If you're going to fly somewhere, see if you can stay longer and have more experiences, rather than flying more times in a year for the same number of experiences.

Name five amazing things you've witnessed on your ecotourism trips.

While the UNESCO World Heritage site on the southern tip of Haida Gwaii is incredible and moving, actually exploring Gwaii Haanas with our Haida guides and seeing the natural systems through their perspective is really transformative.

Seeing humpback whales aggressively defend sea lions from orcas, while we were in a tender, was unbelievable.

Watching grizzly-bear mothers lie down in front of us to nurse cubs, in a place where a few years before they hid from trophy hunters before British Columbians got that banned.

I guess we need to list the rare, white spirit bear and perhaps the most amazing was the first one Kevin saw in 2001, just months after he'd finished negotiating on the Great Bear Rainforest agreement that protected that bear's forest from being clear-cut.

Listening to and watching a dozen humpback whales coordinate and then do bubble-net feeding, and hearing their underwater calls rise through the hydrophone on our quiet deck, and then the explosion of their huge mouths rising from the sea and silvery fish leaping away from them.

What are some ways to reconcile the desire to travel with the need for conservation?

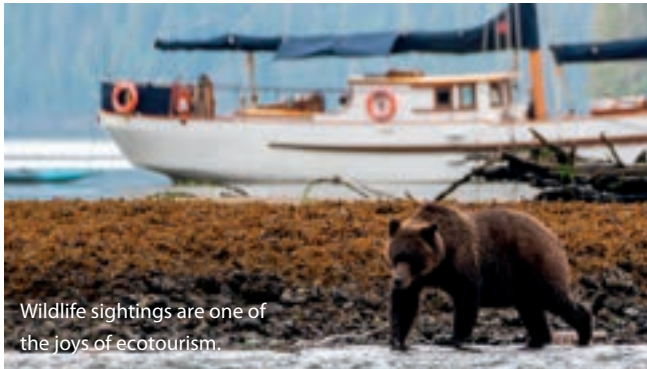
I believe the future of tourism is regenerative travel. What that means is that a travel experience has a symbiotic relationship with the place it operates... It gives back more than it takes. So learning about what regenerative travel is, and asking for it helps the idea to spread and this will change our reality to care for our planet and its people. In the decades we have been doing this we have seen so much change in people's awareness and desire to know their trip is good for the place they visit. It's only going to get more so—but we need to keep asking for it every day.

What are three things you always pack for a trip into the wilderness?

Excellent rain gear, camera gear, bear spray.



Travellers experience a waterfall close up on an expedition.



Wildlife sightings are one of the joys of ecotourism.

How should I prepare for a trip into BC's wilderness?

Your preparation will vary depending on whether you are arranging your own trip or going with professional guides. Many of the places we operate our trips are considered "backcountry," which requires DIY adventurers to have skill and experience with navigation, wilderness survival, first aid, wildlife behaviour, expedition planning, interpretation of weather, tides, currents, charts, bathymetry and more, as well as requires good gear, redundant systems, proper food, permits and more.

If you are going with a guide, I would follow all the recommendations for packing but also, importantly, prepare your mindset. The natural world is not a zoo or a BBC documentary; in many ways it's more incredible than both of those things, especially when you experience it with your five senses, your emotions and your understanding of how the ecosystems interconnect. To do that, you need to remember how it is to absorb the present moment through all senses, to be in the present. We've become addicted to constant, bombastic stimulation on screens. BC's natural world is a balm and a medicine for that and to take it we just need to adjust which part of our brain is in charge.

What is a common mistake travellers make when planning a trip on BC's coast?

They think they can drive to all the wonders... Really it's when you get off the road that things really start to blow your mind. And that takes a bit more time.

What wild place you would still like to visit for the first time?

KS: Yukon Territory

MG: The Aleutian Islands

How did your UVic experiences help prepare you for this venture?

KS: My degree is in Geography with a speciality in coastal-resource management and Environmental Studies. Prior to

Maple Leaf Adventures, I negotiated for five years on the Great Bear Rainforest land-use plan, which was absolutely transformative. That was a direct application of my degree experience and in considering the highest and best use for the land, among many other elements of geography. From that came the idea of building a conservation-based economy on the coast. And as an expedition leader and leader of an ecotourism company, I use mapping, physical geography, social geography and concepts from environmentally minded thinking every day.

MG: A sustainable tourism company that focusses on natural ecosystems and cultural history, and that is by its nature a change-maker, has a lot of facets. So there are many facets of my experience at UVic in the early 1990s that I draw on in this venture. Both the Environmental Studies program and History classes—one class in particular, which was Ken Coates' Native-White Relations and the North—helped me build a world view to understand the societal landscape and changes we work in, and how we can make change. My Creative Writing courses, as well as my experience in the co-op program among newspapers and small businesses, prepared me for a lot of the communications aspects of my role. We do a lot of education and clear communication is key for that. And a systems-theory course I had in Environmental Studies helps me see and understand how our mindsets and other systems here are changing.

How has travel changed you?

MG: I think travel illustrates that there are many ways to live, many potential lives to have, so I can keep a resilient perspective and not be so attached to things or the way life is at the moment. It's also made me a protector of our natural world, because I see how rare the natural bounty is that we have here on the coast. And of course I like to think it has made me a wiser person! 🙏



MAUREEN GORDON and KEVIN SMITH dedicated their professional lives to contributing to a world-class ecotourism industry.

Expert Travel Tips

We asked four UVic alumni with expertise in travel about their favourite places, top how-to tips and cherished memories of their time on the fly.



JENNIFER KINGSLEY in Chukotka autonomous okrug (district), Russia, in northeastern Siberia.

JENNIFER KINGSLEY, MFA in Creative Writing, 2010
Hometown: Ottawa, ON
Current job/work: Writer and guide

Reason I travel frequently: I work as a guide for National Geographic-Lindblad Expeditions on small ships around the world. I also write about places far from my home.

Number of countries visited: No idea.

One thing I always pack: Headlamp. Whether I'm stumbling for the bathroom at night, trying not to wake a shipmate, or reading (so many places don't have reading lights), I'm always happy to have this small item. Also, my own hair conditioner.

One way I prepare for a trip: Lists. As in four pages of bullet points specific to each destination where I work. I also make sure to see family as close to departure as I can manage. I'm often away for one or two months.

Aisle seat or window? Aisle.

A hidden gem I'd recommend: Polynesia, the largest nation on Earth. Take your pick from anywhere within the Polynesian triangle which stretches from Hawai'i to Aotearoa/New Zealand, to Rapa Nui/Easter Island.

Top travel planning tip: Do it your way. Some people love to have all the details, some like to pre-read, some like it all to be a surprise. There is nothing wrong with any of these, so don't judge yourself (or your travel buddies).

Favourite travel splurge: Earrings.

Tip for budget travel: Get a job where you get paid to travel?

Overcoming jet lag hack: Because I cannot sleep on planes and I regularly travel to places with 24- to 36-hour transit times, I'm often so exhausted when I arrive that I don't seem to get much jet lag. That said, I would not recommend this approach. Sleep when you can.

Most used app when travelling: Maps.me

Memorable wildlife experience: I was scuba diving (not my speciality) in French Polynesia, and we were at a depth of 32 metres in a lot of current. We were holding on to the bottom to maintain our position, and I was starting to feel afraid. I closed my eyes to breathe and calm myself down. When I finally looked around, an enormous manta ray was swimming in front of us, from right to left, leaving a sense of grace and calm in its wake.

A challenging travel experience I'd rather forget: Helping to administer COVID tests in rough seas in the Drake Passage between South America and Antarctica. Nothing has made me feel more seasick than those nose swabs and their little test tubes.

Parting thoughts: Travel, like so many things, can be both destructive and constructive. It's fun and rewarding to be on the constructive side whenever possible, but travel always has an impact.

Where to find me: jenniferkingsley.ca, Instagram: @jenniferkingsley



JOHN LEE takes notes in Hobbiton, New Zealand.

JOHN LEE, MA in Political Science, 1996
 Hometown: Born and raised in St. Albans, England, now living in Vancouver.
 Current job: Freelance writer, editor and copywriter.

Number of countries visited: Approximately 25.

One thing I always pack: Teabags.

One way I prepare for a trip: I make sure our cat, Max, is not sleeping under the clothes in my suitcase.

Aisle seat or window? Window, preferably in a two-seat row.

A hidden gem I'd recommend: I'm a big fan of London's esoteric smaller museums, including the Museum of the Home, London Canal Museum, Emery Walker's House, Freud Museum and the Musical Museum.

Top travel planning tip: Before you arrive, book the best-reviewed walking tour you can find.

Favourite travel splurge: Good theatre tickets.

Tip for budget travel: Visit the nearest supermarket to your hotel and stock up on a few items so you won't have to eat out for every meal and snack stop. A room with a fridge is especially useful.

Overcoming jet lag hack: Don't go to sleep when you arrive—try to stay awake until the local bedtime hour. And don't drink on the plane; it makes the time adjustment even harder.

Memorable wildlife experience: Finding a friendly and inquisitive wallaby on my cabin's deck in Tasmania.

Memorable culinary experience: A warm bag of buttery boiled potatoes bought from a train station vendor in Russia's Lake Baikal region, while travelling for six nights on the Trans-Siberian Railway.

A challenging travel experience I'd rather forget: Covering several English seaside towns for a Lonely Planet guidebook during a week of relentless, monsoon-like rain. And it was off-season, so almost everything was closed. I didn't plan that trip very well!

A moment I'll remember forever: I was caught in a snowstorm while crossing a footbridge over a frozen river in Iceland. I stopped, gripped the rails and gazed at the thick flakes swirling around me. It was so quiet, I felt like I was the only person on the planet.

Where to find me: JohnLeeWriter.com and, after abandoning Twitter, now on Bluesky @johnleewriter.bsky.social



A Holden parked by Currumbin Beach in Queensland as captured by **NIK WEST**.

NIK WEST, BA in Economics, 1995
 Hometown: Victoria (originally from Auckland, NZ)
 Current job: Photographer

Reason I travel frequently: I love wandering around new places and meeting people with different cultures.

Number of countries visited: 18

One thing I always pack: Camera

One way I prepare for a trip: Research locations I want to photograph.

Aisle seat or window? Aisle.

A hidden gem I'd recommend: For a quick bite... a Salt Beef Beigel at Beigel Bake, 159 Brick Lane, London. So Good!

Top travel planning tip: Always have a copy of important documents (driver's licence, passport, medical insurance) in Google Drive on my phone.

Favourite travel splurge: Making sure I have the right gear... might be a good pair of walking shoes.

Tip for budget travel: Pack light.

Overcoming jet lag hack: Get out and walk. Don't nap.

Most used app when travelling: Google Maps

Memorable wildlife experience: Photographing in the water off the east coast of Australia and a dolphin shooting right past me. I thought it was going to hit me.

Memorable culinary experience: Eating iguana in Panama.

Where to find me: nikwest.com



LUCAS AYKROYD visits Rano Raraku, the legendary statue quarry on Easter Island.

LUCAS AYKROYD, BA in English, 1996, MA in English, 1997
Current job: Journalist and public speaker

Reason I travel frequently: I write about travel for outlets like *National Geographic* and the *Toronto Star* and cover the Olympics and world hockey championships for IIHF.com.

Number of countries visited: About 50.

One thing I always pack: Resistance bands. Sometimes you only have 15 minutes to squeeze in your workout. I've used them in hotel rooms from Paris to Pyeongchang.

One way I prepare for a trip: I like re-reading books that originally stoked my interest in the destination. For Berlin, that could be *Fatherland*, Robert Harris's alternative-history thriller. Or for Peru, *Prisoners of the Sun*, Hergé's classic Tintin comic album.

Aisle seat or window? When you're 6-foot-3, it's aisle seat or bust.

A hidden gem I'd recommend: Easter Island—not just for the statues, but also for its incredible network of caves and its wild horses.

Tip for budget travel: If you're self-disciplined enough to combine lunch and dinner, there's a large country that shall remain nameless (known for its large portions) where you can survive on happy hours.

Overcoming jet lag hack: Stay on your feet and keep moving. Last year, days after flying back from Switzerland, I went to New York and walked more than 6 km from the Grolier Club in Manhattan to the Great NY Noodletown in Chinatown.


Memorable wildlife experience: The gorillas got hands-on during my press trip in Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. A mother gorilla suddenly put down her baby and placed her hand on the knee of the photographer next to me. Minutes later, a scar-faced blackback stood up, mock-slapped a fellow writer's lap, and marched off.

Memorable culinary experience: Drinking kumiss (fermented horse milk) I bought at a supermarket in Ufa, Russia.

A challenging travel experience I'd rather forget: Choosing the seafood paella at an all-inclusive Mexican resort.

A moment I'll remember forever: Gazing at the giant Abu Simbel statues in Egypt and flashing back to the LEGO model I saw as a child at the original LEGOLAND in Denmark.

Parting thoughts: Women's sports—soccer, hockey, basketball—will become a big driver of sports tourism over the next 10 years.

Where to find me: lucasaykroyd.com, travmedia.com/lucasaykroyd 

Born to Fly

Alumnus **John Wensveen** found support and mentorship during his UVic geography studies, which helped him fulfill his dreams of a career in the aviation business, ascending to his new role as president of the International Space University in France.

BY JENNY MANZER, BA '97



JOHN WENSVEEN stands in a NASA exhibit at a Space Symposium in Colorado Springs earlier this year.

H

e was a small boy, just over three years old, proudly wearing a new US Air Force uniform his parents had purchased for the occasion. It was John Wensveen's first flight. His parents had saved up to take the family on a Christmas vacation from Vancouver to Honolulu. Wensveen still remembers the bright 747 plane, a model nicknamed "Big Orange."

But something went wrong as the plane taxied on the runway—an engine fire broke out. The family had to deplane and find another flight to Hawaii. While some children might have been terrified by the experience, Wensveen was fascinated. "I became obsessed with aviation," he recalls, speaking from his Florida home in a video call.

"I was born with aviation in my blood. I've been the adventurer, the traveller. I don't sit still very long, and I just love travel. But I will say, the older I get the harder it's getting. I got a few miles ahead of me yet," he says, with a smile.

These days, Wensveen has what many would consider a punishing travel schedule that sees him fly from Strasbourg, France to Fort Lauderdale, Florida every two weeks. He has already crossed the Transatlantic 15 times this year—and it is only April. Wensveen divides his time between Florida, where he and his wife, Lisa, have a house, and France, where he works as president of the International Space University, a multi-lingual, multi-country operation dedicated to the discovery, research and development of outer space for peaceful purposes.

He was wooed to this new position not just because of his knowledge of the industry, but his deep experience in the entrepreneurial world. He previously served as Chief Innovation Officer, Nova Southeastern University, and Executive Director of the Levan Center of Innovation, a 54,000-square-foot innovation center known as “The World’s First Theme Park for Entrepreneurs” located in Fort Lauderdale. When he was hired to lead this new multimillion dollar public-private partnership and economic development engine with local, regional, national, and international impact, he told his employers that his only rule for the theme park was “there would be no rules.” One of the first things he would tell students and program participants visiting the Levan Center was “Don’t let anyone say no to you.”

Born in Vancouver, Wensveen was a curious child, and drew inspiration from his maternal grandmother, who was a global traveller and thrilled him with stories of her trips. “From the moment I was born, I was always a challenge to my parents with my sense of curiosity and wonder,” he reflects.

Wensveen holds a PhD and a master’s degree in International Air Transport and Business from Cardiff University in the UK and a BA from UVic. His undergraduate degree in geography from UVic was far from a mere footnote in his career—it was more like a footprint, a path forward to his destiny.

Following his passion for aviation, he took flight lessons and set his sights on becoming a pilot, but he struggled with how to get there. “How do you become a pilot? And it wasn’t through any fault of anybody around me. But nobody knew the pathway of how you do that,” he recalls.

While he never became a commercial airline pilot, he did do a lot of flying throughout his life and eventually, after an uninspiring stint at community college in Vancouver, worked for the discount airline Canada 3000, which was only two years old at the time. It was a chance for him to mature, to be mentored by the company’s CEO, and realize that there were other opportunities around aviation. He became interested in airline operations. “My new dream became not flying airplanes but how you start an airline.”

At 19, he was working for the airline in entry-level positions, including donning the Disney-designed Air Bear mascot outfit, which was the height of an NBA player. He spent considerable time with the CEO, sharing his dream of starting an airline. The

CEO, Angus Kinnear, advised Wensveen to go back to school—so he did.

At UVic, Wensveen found mentorship and support concerning his passion for aviation. Professors Drs. Larry McCann and Colin Wood were the among first people to say to Wensveen: “You can do it.” McCann was a particular influence on Wensveen, and they remained connected after graduation until McCann’s death in 2020.

“I owe so much back to this individual, Dr. Larry McCann, who was a faculty member in the Department of Geography who unfortunately has passed away,” says Wensveen. “He recognized that there was something in me, that I had a passion to do something. And he knew that I needed some guidance, and he gave me some recommendations. He allowed me to deviate from the standard curriculum if you will... to be creative with the types of projects I was involved in. I got to do aviation-themed projects in this geography environment and he was really a motivational factor.”

Wensveen did not think he would make the leap from aviation to space, but the gap between the two industries is closing as there is more commercialization of the sector. While Wensveen has worked closely with experts trained as entrepreneurs, engineers and scientists, he says geography was a perfect training ground for him.

“You could look at everything from a 30,000-foot view. Geography technically does encompass almost every single discipline that you could ever imagine, which positions you to be a truly global thinker and look at things from different angles verses just from an engineering mind or just as a finance mind as an example—and I think that really was the launch pad that allowed me to propel into different areas that got me into space.”

He started as president of the International Space University in September of 2024.

The institution was created because the world needed a place for students to study space and pursue peaceful pursuits alongside the observation of Earth. His out-of-office message begins with “Greetings, Earthling...” and concludes with “See you back at base.”

“There is no typical day, which is one of the things I love about it. So, you start every day with sticky notes of action items knowing that you’re probably not going to address any of those items. This is an unusual president role. It’s a very unique university structure because we’re extremely global in nature,



The International Space University campus in Strasbourg, France.

working with over 110 countries around the world, primarily the space agencies of the world in most cases. And we're neutral to all countries... we were built for peaceful purposes."

He has an internal role at the university, which is a more typical academic admin role, and an external one that involves constant travel and attention. "This role is 24-7, and there's not a lot of sleep that comes with it, and there's zero down time because of all those countries that we are working with, and then having employees scattered around the world as well."

He reflects that he was hired because the university wanted someone with his experience in the entrepreneurial world as well as his knowledge of aviation—the subject of his two books (*Air Transportation: A Management Perspective* and *Wheels Up: Airline Business Plan Development*).

As an applied futurist, he notes that because airlines and airports are so tied to economic engines, the industry goes up and down with the vagaries of the economy, so still operates on some antiquated systems. What he sees in the future of the air transport industry is more use of AI, such as transport vehicles that are not reliant on humans, and planes flying faster and at higher altitudes. Airlines have a huge failure rate, he says, speak-

ing from experience. Along with three co-founders, he started an airline called MAX-jet Airways out of Washington Dulles Airport. It flew from 2003 to 2007, before ultimately meeting its demise when bigger carriers undercut its transatlantic route alongside record fuel and oil prices.

Still, he made his youthful dream of starting an airline come true. He still remembers how challenging life as a student was—balancing finances, stress and a social life. He advises students to eliminate those around them with negative energy, the ones who say you can't do things. He's a big fan

of reverse engineering—walking backwards to figure out how to achieve what you want. "And I'm still asking myself what I want to be when I grow up, because I'm not done," he adds.

Wensveen loves living in France, which he describes as "multiple countries in one." The region he lives in, Alsace, is on the border with Germany, and the culture combines the two. His favourite local dish (which he fears might be a "corny" choice) is escargot—of which there are many variations. He appreciates Florida, where his wife and daughter live, for the weather, the stone crab, and its entrepreneurial spirit. Although he doesn't live in Canada, he is a proud Canadian. He and his wife recently took a 12-day cruise, though, he admits, he continued working. Many Canadians on the cruise wore blue "Canada is Not for Sale" hats. American passengers wore red ones reading "Gulf of America." There were some interesting interactions between the blue hats and the red hats, muses Wensveen.

He travels around the world representing the International Space University, and is rarely in one place for more than four or five days at a time. "It's probably one of the most exciting things that I've ever done because you literally get to work with the world's smartest people, wherever they are in the world." ¶

Bear Witness

UVic alumnus and geography professor **Chris Darimont** advised researchers who found that bears viewed as a part of ecotourism are not predisposed to causing conflicts with neighbouring communities—suggesting the two can coexist.

BY ANNE MACLAURIN, BA '91, CERT '00



Kelly Milton (left; Nuxalk Fisheries and Wildlife Staff at the time) and Emina Ida (right; Raincoast Field Assistant at the time) collecting data at a hair snag.

A majestic grizzly mother and her two cubs splash after some spawning salmon in a riverine pool located in Nuxalk territory, home to abundant wildlife. Nearby, ecotourists are eager to catch a glimpse of the bear family.

Interactions like these between people and animals are the focus of work by UVic professor Chris Darimont and his graduate students. Darimont, Raincoast Research Chair in Applied Conservation Science, has spent his career researching questions brought to his UVic Applied Conservation Science Lab (ACS) by communities and other partners on topics related to animal conservation.

One of their recent studies, led by recent PhD graduate Kate Field, found grizzly bears that visited ecotourism areas along the Atnarko River on the province's central coast were less likely than others to encounter conflict with people in communities downstream. Findings in this particular study suggested that, if done responsibly, ecotourism did not predispose the animals to have conflicts with humans.

"Our lab has studied wolves, deer, mountain lions, black bears, grizzly bears, mountain goats, salmon, humpback and

killer whales, and more, all within the context of the coupling between nature and society," says Darimont, BSc '00, PhD '07. "We cannot understand the life of the grizzly bear, for example, without understanding its connection to people."

Working with Indigenous communities has always been important to Darimont and his team. During his own graduate work, he learned how to engage respectfully with local communities, long before academia started shifting toward more inclusive research. The value in considering not only wildlife but also the relationships people have with animals led Darimont to learn from people with deep, long-term knowledge.

The recent grizzly bear study conducted by Field, who earned a PhD in geography from UVic in 2025, a Bachelor of Science in 2016 and an Master of Science in geography in 2019, was an example of these partnerships. "The Nuxalk and BC Parks had jointly managed grizzly-bear ecotourism in Tweedsmuir Provincial Park," says Darimont. "And they were interested in working with researchers to assess the conditions for bears in the park. Do ecotourists impact bears?" Another key question was whether the bears involved in ecotourism viewings affect people living in nearby communities.

Field worked closely with Nuxalk scientists to examine how ecotourist numbers and salmon conditions might affect grizzly-bear behaviour. Remote cameras and genetic tagging revealed some answers.

It turned out that how ecotourists influence bears depended on how much salmon were around. When there was plenty of salmon, fewer bears tended to show up when ecotour sites were

busy with people. Presumably, many bears want to avoid the crowds of ecotourists, preferring to catch salmon in peace elsewhere. But when salmon numbers were low, cameras showed that bear numbers will increase at ecotour sites, where the fishing is good. And those bears most likely to tolerate the ecotourists are mothers with cubs.

This information—and much more gathered by Field's team—is currently being used by the Nuxalk and parks team to update management procedures in Tweedsmuir. "Working with managers to apply science to their community-specific conservation objectives hugely motivates our work," says Field.

Field worked with crew members from Nuxalk Fisheries and Wildlife to track grizzly bears by collecting their fur and images, as well as data related to their behaviour at ecotourism sites. Nuxalk knowledge also played a huge role. "The people informed this study as much as the bear data," says Field. "Our colleagues' in-depth knowledge about the river and how bears use it directly informed our decisions in the field, like site selection, for example." This collaboration allowed the partnership to answer local questions about whether and how ecotourism affects grizzlies.

Field and team also assessed whether the bears at the ecotourism sites were the same bears that later got into conflict in downstream communities. Genetic screens between ecotour bears and those captured or euthanized in conflict showed only one match in 30. Mathematical modelling revealed that such a low match suggested that ecotour bears were in fact less likely to be involved in conflict.

The team had hypothesized that bears exposed to ecotourism were more used to people and therefore more likely to encounter conflict with humans. "That's not what we found, which suggests other explanations for conflict. Locally-driven conflict-reduction programs, like the Nuxalk Bear Safe initiative, use education and mitigative action to address conflict-drivers in the community," adds Field.

The finding made sense to the research team, including the Nuxalk. "Well-fed bears, like the ones at ecotour sites, generally don't need to take chances," says Field.

Darimont has built his research career around this kind of collaboration with people and scientists in local rainforest communities. "I was fortunate to be welcomed and guided by many in Bella Bella who told me what they expected of me as a researcher and as a community member," says Darimont. "Little

by little, it is how I came to understand how research should be done. My students and I are still learning today."

That original relationship has grown over 25 years. Since the lab's inception in 2012, several generations of UVic graduate students have been embedded in the Heiltsuk community, explains Darimont. "We also learn from neighbouring nations, including the Kitasoo Xai-xais, Wuikinuxv and Nuxalk with which we also partner.

"These communities trust us to work with them to generate high-quality evidence together in a rapid real-world timeline," says Darimont. "Their governments incorporate this Western science into their decision-making in a way complementary to their own traditional knowledge of animals in their territory."

The ACS Lab crew loves what they do. "Our job is to inform decision-makers of the likely outcomes of various policy decisions, whether those be more restrictions or development. Our job is not to lobby; it is to give leaders a fair sense of the outcomes of various scenarios from the perspective of science," says Darimont. These information streams join others derived from Indigenous knowledge, economics and other dimensions on which decisions are ultimately made.

The statement loops back to the overarching philosophy of the Applied Conservation Science Lab. The research draws on ecology, geography, social sciences and more. Most importantly, the work is designed to deliver evidence so it can be applied.

"The managers from Indigenous governments are increasingly at the centre of wildlife policy in BC," says Darimont. "When the Nuxalk and BC Parks came to us with questions, we aimed to deliver evidence that could contribute to their policy." ¶



DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARDS

University's Outstanding Grads Honoured

Recipients and supporters gathered at the Victoria Conference Centre event in April.

PHOTOS BY ARMANDO TURA AND MICHAEL KISSINGER



(From left to right) **VERNA MILLER**, **TANIA WILLARD**, **MARCIA TURNER**, **AJU PETER** and **CRYSTAL CLARK** take part in a blanketing ceremony at the Distinguished Alumni Awards reception.

The University of Victoria and the UVic Alumni Association recognized the achievements of 15 remarkable grads at this year's Distinguished Alumni Awards reception at the Victoria Conference Centre. Twelve recipients travelled from as far away as Santiago, Chile and Iqaluit, Nunavut to take part in the event, which included a blanketing ceremony for Indigenous alums and a drum procession from members of Songhees Nation.

Go to uvic.ca/alumni/awards or scan the QR code to read profiles and Q&A's with each recipient.



This year's Distinguished Alumni Award recipients are:

PRESIDENTS' ALUMNI AWARDS

Jennie Christensen, PhD '08
Thom Garfat, BA '74, PhD '96
Leopoldo Infante, MA '85, PhD '90
Cassandra Miller, BMus '05
Suromitra Sanatani, BA '85
Laurel Schafer, PhD '99
Jill Schnarr, MBA '18
Tania Willard, BFA '98

EMERGING ALUMNI AWARDS

Chari Arespacochaga, MFA '15
Katie Gamble, BCom '18
Sahar Sam, PhD '16

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY ALUMNI AWARDS

Crystal Clark, BFA '02
Verna Miller, BA '96
Aaju Peter, LLB '05, Cert. '22
Marcia Turner, Cert. '96, Dip. '05, BA '12



Emerging Alumni Award recipients (left to right) **KATIE GAMBLE** and **SAHAR SAM**.



Presidents' Award recipient **LAUREL SCHAFER**.



Presidents' Alumni Award recipient **SUROMITRA SANATANI** with UVic President **KEVIN HALL**.



Presidents' Award recipient **JENNIE CHRISTENSEN**.



Presidents' Alumni Award recipient **LEOPOLDO INFANTE** (eighth from the left) travelled from Santiago, Chile to celebrate with family, friends and colleagues.



Presidents' Alumni Award recipient **JILL SCHNARR**.



UVic Chancellor **MARION BULLER** emceed the evening's ceremony.



EUGENE SAM and **NORMAN GARRY SAM**, Songhees Nation, led the DAA recipients into the Victoria Conference Centre theatre with a drum procession.

Becoming a Saké Samurai

Inspired by an insatiable thirst for Japanese culture, UVic grad **Patrick Ellis** became Canada's largest importer of their national drink, earning the rare distinction of "Saké Samurai."

BY MICHAEL KISSINGER, BED '94



Since starting Blue Note Saké more than 25 years ago, **PATRICK ELLIS** estimates he's introduced two million bottles of saké to Canadians.

The way Patrick Ellis describes his first encounter drinking saké, it was love at first sight—or, more accurately, first sip. It was the mid-1980s, and his UVic Japanese professor, who had already introduced him to sushi, filled Ellis's tiny cup before his own (as is tradition). They raised their cups, said "*kanpai*" and downed the rice-fermented alcohol in one go. It wasn't a top-shelf saké and was served warm to tone down any harsh flavours—but he was immediately smitten.

"Because saké is completely ensconced in and representative of [Japanese] culture, for me to imbibe was to take in the whole culture and go on these imaginary trips... It wasn't long before I'd go down to Willows Beach by myself with a bottle and just sit there."

That world-shifting experience set Ellis on a path that would take him across the Pacific more than a hundred times as Canada's leading importer of premium saké. In 2018, he received the prestigious title of "Saké Samurai" from the Japan Saké Brewers Association. The award is given to individuals who've demonstrated an "outstanding contribution to the understanding, appreci-

ation or promotion of saké" and Japanese culture as a whole and who continue to promote Japanese saké around the world "with pride and passion." Ellis compares the honour to a lifetime achievement award given out at the Oscars except there's an expectation that your work will continue.

"It's part of the ceremony... the commitment to continue to drive forward," he says. "That responsibility is part of my compass."

CULTURE CLUB

Ellis grew up in Kincardine, ON, and was always interested in Japanese culture. His family later moved to Victoria, where he started a general arts degree at UVic. Two years in, Ellis realized that he

wanted to study Japanese. Entering his third year at UVic, he dove into every Japanese class available through the Department of Pacific and Asian Studies, which at the time was called Pacific and Oriental Studies. “The intent was to immerse myself in Japanese culture.”

At the time, UVic had an exchange program with Keio University in Tokyo. Ellis managed to get accepted, which changed his life. “When I got the call that I’d been accepted, I still remember what the weather was like, where I was, that kind of thing. And I knew that this absolute long shot, particularly because of the competition, was now a gift that was up to me to take responsibly.”

During his time at Keio, he joined a university club where he would spend his lunchtimes listening to Japanese students talk with one another. “I couldn’t understand anything... But after about three or four months, it started to break through.” The rest of the time he soaked up the culture—the language, the customs, the sights and sounds, the food and drink. “I became such a sponge for it.”

Upon graduating from UVic, he was determined to return to Japan. After a stint in Toronto as a consultant for a joint restaurant venture with a Japanese company, Ellis signed on with an engineering firm building Japanese automotive facilities in Ontario. Because of his fluency in English and Japanese, he later joined the purchasing department of a General Motors and Suzuki joint venture.

“Often weeks would go by that I wouldn’t speak any English at all. My environment, my suppliers were Japanese. Everybody I reported to right up to the president was Japanese.”

He eventually realized however that no matter how much of his role involved being a conduit between two countries and cultures, his job would always be in Canada. “I learned later on that I was not able to get back to Japan through Suzuki [because] they had a rule that they would not siphon off local employees for their own.”

So, he pulled up stakes and joined a small trading firm in Tokyo that imported Canadian food, beer and wine. But his real education would begin when he went out at night with his Japanese colleagues.

SAKÉ 101

Although it originated in China, saké production in Japan dates back more than 1,400 years, with an estimated 1,000 brewers currently in operation across the country.

Because of its unique method of production, which involves fermenting rice, koji mold and yeast, saké is neither a wine, a spirit nor a beer, and occupies its own alcohol category. This past December, UNESCO recognized Japan’s traditional process of saké brewing by adding it to its Intangible Cultural Heritage list.

Ellis is quick to point out that even though rice is the key ingredient in saké, it’s not “rice wine” as many people assume. There are parallels, however. With more than 100 saké rice varieties, each with a unique flavour profile akin to wine grapes, saké comes in a range of styles and tastes. Alcohol levels in saké are also in line with wine, ranging from 12 to 18 per cent ABV. Good saké should also be served chilled in a wine glass, says Ellis.

But that’s where the similarities end. Saké’s lower acidity compared to wine makes it more suitable for food pairing. Ellis often recommends burgers as the perfect gateway food to showcase saké’s versatility.

Then there’s the matter of umami—considered one of the five basic tastes, alongside sweet, sour, salty and bitter, and means “delicious savoury taste” in Japanese. Saké is chock-full of the stuff. “[Saké] is a umami explosion in my mouth,” Ellis says. “It is an absolute symphony. And it takes me on a tour.”

Evenings out in Japan also opened Ellis’s window to the wider world of saké, especially those produced by small brewers dotting the country. Unlike the heated saké he was introduced to in Victoria, these sakés were an entirely different beast, says Ellis. “Premium saké was just starting to become some-



Patrick Ellis at the Saké Samurai induction ceremony in Kyoto, Japan.

what of an entity even though they've been making sakés for a hundred years... And because of the bullet train... people could do day trips to [these regions that made local, premium sakés]. That really helped give a boost to the image of what we call local, craft saké—what I call premium saké.”

HE SHOOTS, HE SCORES

At this point, Ellis wanted to share his passion for Japan's national drink. So, he moved back to Canada and hatched a plan to import premium saké. Ellis named his import company Blue Note Saké, a nod to the esteemed jazz label and the deep reverence Japan has for the musical genre.

“The first shipment comes in seven cases, and I sold the first case right away, but it was to me—I was my first customer and probably still my largest customer.”

The other six cases gathered dust as he pestered restaurants across Vancouver only to get rebuffed at every turn. Eventually, his persistence wore down one restaurant owner, who agreed to take a single case if Ellis promised to leave him alone. A few weeks later, the owner called Ellis asking if he had more for sale. The New York Rangers had been in town to play the Vancouver Canucks who had recently acquired former Ranger Mark Messier. In New York, Messier and his former teammate Wayne Gretzky, who had joined the Rangers, would always go out for sushi after the game. When Messier and his former teammates showed up, including Gretzky, they asked the owner to bring them his best saké. He sold the entire case that night.

“I often tell people that I literally started the saké business with Gretzky as a silent partner, and he doesn't even know it.”

‘SWEETHEARTS OF THE BALL’

Inroads into the Canadian market have been slow but steady. Blue Note currently carries

approximately 120 products from more than a dozen producers. Since he started the business more than 25 years ago, Ellis estimates he's introduced two million bottles of saké to Canadians.

“It began with the Japanese restaurants, but as I built it out from there, my vision is to literally see a bottle of saké in every fridge in Canada.”

Achieving this requires a considerable amount of outreach, says Ellis, who has organized saké festivals, tasting events and seminars around his beloved beverage. It appears to be working. Over the past decade, sophisticated imbibers have noticed saké making its way onto an increasing number of cocktail menus and fine dining wine lists. You can find saké brewers in Vancouver, Oregon, California, even temperance hotspots like Salt Lake City, Utah, as well as England, France and New Zealand. In 2022, Asahi Shuzo, the company behind popular saké brand Dassai, struck a sponsorship deal with the New York Yankees baseball team. And in December, the same company announced plans to blast saké ingredients to the International Space Station to ferment a special brew that would retail for 100 million yen, or about \$653,000 US, for a 100-ml bottle.

“Right now, we are the sweethearts of the ball,” Ellis says of saké's status on the booze barometer. “We are kind of the cool kids, but still very much below the radar.”

Every year, the induction ceremony for Saké Samurais takes place at a sacred shrine in Kyoto, Japan. The ceremony takes three hours and is attended by the media and Japanese dignitaries including priests and priestesses and is followed by a press conference.

“In my acceptance speech, I opened with a favourite quote of mine by Mark Twain: ‘The two most important days in a person's life are the day you were born, and the day you find out why,’” Ellis says. “I am blessed to have discovered that at an early enough stage. I do not believe I get to do what I do.”





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Supporting the Next Generation

UVic Law Class of '94 celebrated their reunion by raising funds together for a meaningful student award.

BY DAMON VAN DER LINDE



Left to right: **OLIVER DEMUTH**, Justice **JASMIN AHMAD**, Deah **FREYA KODAR** and **GORDON HAIGHT** reconnected in October for a UVic Law Class of 1994 reunion.

When the UVic Law Class of 1994 met on campus for their 30th anniversary reunion in October 2024, it was a chance to reconnect, reminisce and reflect on their remarkable journeys that began in Victoria decades ago. Flipping through old yearbooks, sharing stories and celebrating with a reception in the Fraser Building student lounge, where they once spent countless hours studying and bonding, brought back a flood of memories.

“Walking through the doors of the law school again brought tears to my eyes,” says Justice Jasmine Ahmad, now a judge on BC’s Supreme Court. “The emotions and memories were all so positive. Many of us felt the same way—that those years were truly transformative.”

For the 27 Law alumni who travelled from across North America to be there, this reunion didn’t just serve as a trip down memory lane—it became a catalyst for giving back.

“Every single one of us recognized the privilege and opportunity that being a UVic Law graduate gave us,” says Justice Ahmad. “It didn’t matter what career path we took—not everyone pursued law—but we all agreed: ‘Let’s help give someone else the same opportunity.’”

That shared commitment led to the creation of the Law Class of 1994 Prize in Indigenous Field Study. This annual award will support students in the upper years of the JD/JID Joint Degree program in Canadian Common Law and Indigenous Legal Orders, recognizing those who have demonstrated excellence in community-based learning, the application of Indigenous laws, and contributions to Indigenous communities.

“We wanted to ensure that students—especially those who may not have historically had the same opportunities—could benefit from the same experiences we were so fortunate to have,” says Justice Ahmad. “Many of us didn’t come from privileged backgrounds or even know a lawyer before law school. But at UVic, we felt like we belonged. We had a voice.”

Students in the JD/JID joint-degree program spend one full-time semester in each of their third and fourth years immersed in community, studying Indigenous legal traditions with community-based experts. These field study courses give students firsthand experience of Indigenous legal orders, sources of law, reasoning processes and governance structures and work with communities on law-related projects. The inaugural prize will be awarded to students who worked in field schools this year with either Anishinaabe Law (Rama First Nation, ON) or Dene Law (Pedzeh Ki First Nation, Łı́ı́łı́ Kú́é First Nation, and the umbrella organization of both First Nations, Dehcho First Nations, NWT).

The class also saw this initiative as a way to honour their Indigenous classmates from 30 years ago, including Chief Justice Leonard Marchand, the first Indigenous person to hold the role of Chief Justice of British Columbia.

A REMARKABLE SHOW OF GENEROSITY

Collectively, the class raised enough to establish a meaningful student award. Then, in an extraordinary gesture, a classmate matched the total raised, doubling its impact.

“Within days, we had surpassed our original target,” Justice Ahmad recalls. “That’s the generosity and spirit of my classmates—a group of people I’m so incredibly proud to be part of.”

She encourages fellow alumni to consider how they can contribute, whether through mentorship, financial support, or simply staying engaged with the university, emphasizing that awards like these do more than ease financial burdens—they help instill confidence by providing students with the affirmation that they are on the right track and that others believe in their potential.

“It’s important to know that not only do you belong, but that you have supporters who recognize the value you bring,” Justice Ahmad says. “It struck me that 30 years later, and despite the different fields and industries people went into, we all recognize how grateful we are for the inclusion and the voice we were given at UVic.”

Class Notes

News and photos from around the alumni world

1970s

BILL MCELROY, BA '74, Dip. '75, was awarded the King Charles III Coronation Medal in recognition of more than 50 years of community volunteer service. He has been the senior staff person at six non-profit organizations and has served as a board director on more than 40 different non-profit organizations. He currently serves as chair of the Capital Region Action Team for Sexually Exploited Youth and sits on the Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice Committee.

BRUCE ALEXANDER MCKEAN, BA '70, whose \$1.5-million gift to UVic in 2021 established the Chief Mungo Martin Research Chair in Indigenous Mental Health, made a \$203-million donation to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Foundation. McKean's donation to CAMH is the largest cumulative donation for mental health care in Canadian history.

1980s

UVic double grad **EDITH LORING-KUHANGA**, BEd '86, MA '12, received a 2025 Indspire Award in the Education category. The annual Indspire Awards recognize and celebrate Indigenous leaders of all generations who demonstrate outstanding career achievement, promote self-esteem and pride

for Indigenous communities and serve as inspirational role models.

1990s

Theatre grad **ERIN MACKLEM**, BFA '98, is a playwright, costume designer, songwriter and beader of Métis, Irish and French ancestry. Her play *Blue Beads and Blueberries* was mounted at the Manitoba Theatre for Young People in February. It's billed as "an adventure of self-discovery... [that] transforms an ancient fairy tale into a celebration of Métis culture."



AISLINN HUNTER

Alum and former UVic sessional instructor **AISLINN HUNTER**, BFA '96, was recently the guest editor of *Best Canadian Poetry 2025* (Biblioasis), an annual anthology that selects the best poems published by Canadians in literary journals over the course of a year. This issue features writing by 50 Canadian poets including Anne Carson, Billy Ray-Belcourt, Robert Bringham and UVic alum **KAYLA CZAGA**, former Writing department chair Lorna Crozier and the Griffin Poetry Prize-winning author Eve

Joseph, whose archives are held by UVic's library.

UVic double grad **LYANA PATRICK**, BA '97, MA '04, initially studied journalism and was inspired by her co-op experience with the CBC TV series *North of 60* to pursue film studies. Although she ended up becoming a health researcher, Patrick continues to incorporate film and storytelling into her work, leading to her first feature length documentary *Nechako*. Produced by Lantern Films, Experimental Forest Films and the National Film Board of Canada, *Nechako* follows two communities who form an unlikely alliance to rebuild their Nations in the wake of the damming of the Nechako River and a looming court decision. More info at lanternfilms.ca/nechako.

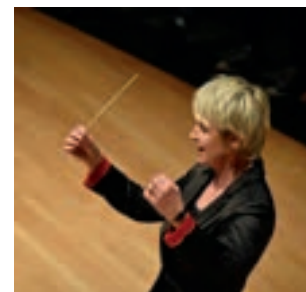
LOUISE VOGLER, BCom '95, BA '95, recently received the Distinguished Alumni Award from the China Europe International Business School at the school's 30th anniversary celebration in November. Out of



LOUISE VOGLER

the 30 alumni who received the award, Vogler was one of three non-Chinese foreigners to be recognized and the only non-Chinese woman.

Family therapist **ALLAN WADE**, MA '90, PhD '00, was named to the Order of Canada. Wade specializes in addressing and preventing violence. By examining how adults and children endure, respond to and resist violence, he has helped inform practical applications in social, justice and health services in Canada and beyond. A co-developer of Response-Based Practice, he employs social justice principles to restore dignity after harm.



CYNTHIA JOHNSTON TURNER

CYNTHIA JOHNSTON TURNER, MEd '98, recently released an album with composer Michael Barry. Recorded by the Budapest Winds in 2024, *An Evening with Michael Barry* "showcases the talent of the Budapest Winds under Johnston Turner, as she vividly brings the composer's demands to life." A conductor and clinician with a passion for contemporary music, Johnston Turner serves as

Dean of the Faculty of Music at Wilfrid Laurier University and was previously Director of Bands, Professor of Conducting, and Artistic Director of the Contemporary Chamber Ensemble at the University of Georgia. Her dynamic and engaging conducting has taken her across North America, Europe and South America.

2000s

MARY VALLIS COWAN, BA '02, has been named editor in chief of Yahoo News Canada. In her new



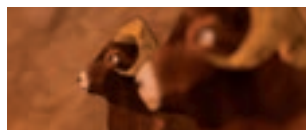
MARY VALLIS COWAN

role, she'll oversee the newsroom and be responsible for editorial direction, audience development, operations and Canadian content partnerships. Her leadership will help evolve Yahoo News to continue to serve Canadian audiences with a focus on quality curation and impactful stories. Vallis Cowan is a veteran journalist with more than 20 years of experience in the field, including stints at the CBC, *Toronto Star* and *National Post*, as well as seven years as a journalism professor at Toronto's Centennial College.

KEVIN ORR, BA '02, has been appointed as the new

chairperson of the Hong Kong SAR Government's Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Fund (SIE Fund) Task Force. The task force will oversee the operation of the SIE Fund to promote social innovation and nurture social entrepreneurship as a means of alleviating poverty and social exclusion. In November, the Hong Kong Institute of Directors named Orr as one of its Directors of the Year at its annual awards, which recognize outstanding boards and directors who promote good practices in corporate governance and director professionalism.

Northlore is a hybrid documentary co-directed by Yukon filmmakers and UVic grads **DAVID HAMELIN**, BFA '04, and **MELAINA SHELDON**, BA '05. Weaving animation and live action, the film explores the mystical stories and connections forged between the people and wildlife of Canada's north. Though every person's experience with nature is different, the film celebrates the transformation of the human spirit when confronted with the absolute power of the wilderness. *Northlore* is available for streaming at nfb.ca.



Northlore

NORAH PERKINS, BA '03, is the recipient of a 2024 Nibby. Perkins and her work partner, Becky Brown, received the award for Literary Agent of the Year at the



NORAH PERKINS

2024 British Book Awards. The co-founders of the Curtis Brown Heritage Division were praised for the wide-ranging list of authors (more than 150) they represent, including important literary voices and neglected women writers. The two were also commended for their numerous reissues, which have often been out of print for decades, new posthumous collections for A.A. Milne, Gerald Durrell and Iris Murdoch, as well as their own archival projects such as *42: The Wildly Improbable Ideas of Douglas Adams*.

TOBYN SOWDEN, BSc '09, was named the Pacific region's EY Entrepreneur of the Year 2024 for his work with Redbrick. Through its comprehensive suite of shared services—from digital marketing to finance and culture initiatives—Redbrick provides the tools entrepreneurs need to scale at all growth stages. Redbrick is at the forefront of sustainable entrepreneurship and innovation. Its Digital Scope initiative and partnership with UVic's INSPIRE: STEM for Social Impact program are both key in reducing environmental impact and advancing the shift toward carbon neutrality.

OWEN WARE, BA '05, recently released his fifth book, *Return of the Gods: Mythology in Romantic Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford University Press). "This book holds special significance for me because it contains ideas that I first began to develop as an undergraduate student at UVic," Ware says. "As a philosophy major, I became fascinated with the intersections of philosophy, poetry, and literature, and I ended up taking several courses in the English department taught by professors Stephen Ross and



OWEN WARE

Gary Kuchar. They were some of the most stimulating courses I took as an undergraduate, and they helped me formulate views about how ideas have their own lives and afterlives across disciplinary boundaries. It was only in the process of writing my book that I realized the extent to which my approach had been shaped by my wonderful professors at UVic. I remain deeply indebted to them." More information at owenware.ca.

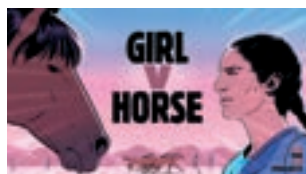
SIMON SCHNIEDER, BSc '03, who graduated with a biology degree and a minor in film studies, is part of the directing team behind the new documentary *Resident Orca*. The film follows the unlikely

partnership between Indigenous matriarchs, a billionaire philanthropist, orca experts and an aquarium owner as they attempt to free Lolita, captured 53 years ago as a baby, only to spend the rest of her life performing in the smallest whale tank in North America. *Resident Orca* is available to stream on Crave. More info at orca.film.

2010s

IZABELLE GRENON, PhD '10, has lived in Japan for 14 years and recently published a book to support foreign nationals living in Japan. The publication, *Japan Guide: From Renting to Rice Cooking*, was recently selected as a finalist in the Foreword INDIES Book of the Year Awards. More information at izabellegrenon.com.

Former CFUV staffer **MICHELLE MACKLEM**, BA '12, won an Ambie for Best Production and Sound Design for her work on the ESPN podcast *Girl v. Horse* (a radio play). Ambies are the sound and audio awards version of the Oscars. The four-episode series chronicles a runner's



Girl v. Horse

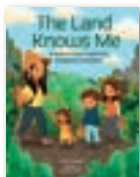
extraordinary battle against epilepsy and her 80-kilometre ultramarathon race against a horse.



ZET LE

Business grad **ZET LE**, BCom '17, gave up a corporate job to make his dreams come true by starting Y Not Today, a unique Bingsu ice-cream and bubble-tea business in Calgary. The cherry on top? Y Not Today was nominated for Small Business of the Year (up to 10 employees) by *CanadianSME Small Business Magazine*. See what all the fuss is about at ynottoday.ca.

UVic triple grad and Distinguished Alumni Award recipient **LEIGH JOSEPH**, BA '10, MSc '12, PhD '24, has a new children's book out called *The*



Land Knows Me: A Nature Walk Exploring Indigenous Wisdom. The book is "an

educational, hands-on journey to discover all the wonderful uses and gifts of the plants around us. Through the Indigenous traditions of Squamish culture, you'll learn how to ground yourself on the land, how to introduce yourself in the Squamish language to your plant relatives, and the many teachings about plants, cultural stories and learnings related to the flora seen on your walk."

A documentary by UVic writing grad **GUOCHEN (CHEN) WANG**, BFA '18, MFA '24, and UVic historian Elizabeth Vibert has been making the festival rounds. *Aisha's Story* premiered at Toronto's prestigious Hot Docs International Documentary Festival in April and opened Vancouver's DOXA festival in May. The film follows a Palestinian grain miller in a Jordanian refugee camp who safeguards



Aisha's Story

her culture and shares her people's history through food. *Aisha's Story* was made as part of the Four Stories About Food Sovereignty project—a UVic-led, transnational effort to document community responses to climate change, global economic pressures and political instability through the lens of small-scale food producers on four continents.

Writing double grad **KYEREN REGEHR**, BFA '11, MFA '13, has been appointed as the City of Victoria's seventh Poet Laureate. Regehr is an award-winning poet and the current artistic director of Planet Earth Poetry (one of Canada's longest-running weekly reading series). In addition to curating community events over the next two years, she will be hosting *The Poet Laureate Podcast*, featuring esteemed poets from across the country. Regehr served on the editorial board of *The Malahat Review* and is the author

of *Cult Life* (finalist for the Victoria Butler Book Prize and the national ReLit Award). Her work has been published across Canada, Australia and the US.



KYEREN REGEHR

2020s

Proud UVic alum and communications specialist **STEVE HAMILTON**, Dip. '20, has been on a winning streak. In 2023, he received Prince George's Citizen of the Year in the Lifetime Achievement category. In 2024, he received the Medal of Good Citizenship by the Province of British Columbia. And this year, he was given a King Charles III Coronation Medal, which is awarded to select members of the Canadian Forces and public service, as well as individuals who made significant contributions to the country or achieved accomplishments that brought credit to Canada. "I truly credit my education at UVic for teaching me how to not just tell a story, but to do it well—with emotion—and, most importantly, to capture people's attention and to motivate them to give back," Hamilton says.

Writing grad **MORGAN WRIGHT**, BFA '21, and fellow alum **GHISLAINE SINCLAIR**,



Milk Bag publishes experimental

MA '23, have launched a new Canadian literary arts magazine. The evocatively titled

poetry, fiction and art. "We want to embolden those living and working in Canada to submit works that push boundaries and challenge tradition through process, identity, form, and content. We're looking for 2%, full

fat, skim, cream, oat, almond, and—hell—even pea milk, baby. If you made it, we want it." Take a sip at milkbagmagazine.com. 🍷

What's New With You?

Be in the next Class Notes. Send news and photos to: torch@uvic.ca

Farewells

After a full life, **CHUCK HARRIS** slipped the surly bonds of earth in January 2024 at age 93. He was born on the Prairies during the Great Depression and lived a childhood without telephones, electricity or running water. He drove his younger brother to a one-room schoolhouse on a horse drawn sulky. He had an unsettled childhood in Victoria with his father away through the war years but found stability at various schools including St Louis College and Victoria High School, graduating in 1949. While at school he had many jobs hawking newspapers, delivering telegrams which often contained bad news and wiping train



CHUCK HARRIS

engines at the E&N Railway Roundhouse.

After completing one year at Victoria College, he moved with his buddies to Vancouver and enrolled at UBC, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in psychology and a Bachelor of Social Work. Summer jobs found him wiping in the engine room of the Princess Louise on weekly trips to Skagway, working on a BC Hydro water chute at Jordan River, filing documents as a junior clerk in the vault of the Legislature or clearing brush for survey parties who were evaluating timber near Chilliwack.

He taught English and Social Studies in Richmond before retiring to Pender Island where he and his wife, Doreen, welcomed B&B guests to their home for 25 years. Volunteering for the Pender Island Parks Commission, nine years as chair, Harris was instrumental in legally registering and opening more than 22 of the public trails and beach accesses on the two Pender Islands enjoyed by locals and visitors.

Knowing how post-secondary education had given him a

fulfilling life, Harris was proud that two of his grandchildren were earning degrees at Vic College's successor, the University of Victoria.

Hereditary Chief, **HEMAS KLA-LEE-LEE-KLA (BILL WILSON)**, passed away in January. The Kwakwaka'wakw hereditary chief was of the Kwakiutl First Nation, located in northeast Vancouver Island. He earned a degree in Political Science from UVic in 1970. According to the Canadian Bar Association, Wilson was the second-ever Indigenous person to graduate from law school in BC. He is survived by his spouse, **BEV SELLARS**, BA '97, and his daughters, who are both lawyers: former cabinet minister **JODY WILSON-RAYBOULD**, BA '96, and Kory Wilson.

The world lost a great mind when **DONALD LANG**, MA '82, PhD '86, died suddenly in October. He leaves behind his wife Betty of 63 years, two children (Stephen and Mia) and many other beloved relatives, friends and colleagues. Over his 87 years, he lived a full life, including his early years as a

radio announcer in Newfoundland, a naval career that included teaching at Canadian military colleges, a sessional instructor at the University of Victoria and, in his later years, an author of several books that encompassed his passion for values, leadership, golf and philosophy. Dr. Lang will be remembered fondly by his many students whom he inspired to seek truth and a better world. An avid gardener, he created an oasis from sand; he believed that with the right nurturing, everything can grow. As such, in lieu of flowers, in his memory, his family asks that you consider planting a tree, or supporting childhood literacy/education. A celebration of life will be held at a later date. 🍷



DONALD LANG

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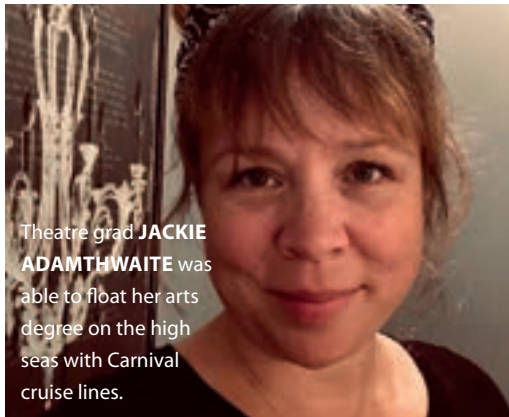
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Life is a Carnival

As a recent Theatre grad in her 20s, Jackie Adamthwaite put her production skills to work on a cruise ship, stage managing shows for an international crowd at sea.

BY JACKIE ADAMTHWAITE, BFA '01



Theatre grad JACKIE ADAMTHWAITE was able to float her arts degree on the high seas with Carnival cruise lines.



People joke about running off to join the circus; I came closer than most. As a twentysomething with a theatre degree, a handful of years of stage management experience and itchy feet, I packed my bags and headed to Florida to join my first ship. I was newly hired as a stage manager aboard the *Carnival Legend* and about to spend six months at sea.

I grew up as a “navy brat,” so I’d seen some big ships, but nothing prepared me for the floating city that loomed up before me as I got off the crew bus at the Port of Miami. The only thing more shocking than the size of the ship was the enormity and awesomeness of the onboard theatre. It was like they plucked a venue right off the Vegas strip and built the ship around it. The main show lounge had more bells and whistles than sophisticated roadhouses in Canada. Fully equipped with state-of-the-art lighting and sound equipment, the theatre also had a built-in revolve, hydraulic pit and platforms, as well as a fully automated fly system for scenery and people! It rivaled anything I’d seen on Broadway.

Known as the “party ships,” Carnival had some of the best shows at sea. We did two or three different production shows each cruise and at least one Vegas-style magic show. In between, we worked with comics, jugglers, hypnotists and Argentinian fire gauchos. We sometimes offered “Rock the Boat” charter cruises and hosted bands like Styx, Journey and REO Speedwagon.

Sea days were spent either rehearsing or on maintenance projects. But on port days it was all about “What time are we getting off the ship? Where are we going to eat? and Whose turn is it to buy drinks?” We didn’t sleep much. On a show day, we might leave the ship at 9 a.m., spend the day at the beach, return to the ship at 4:30 p.m. to start our pre-show setup and then head to the staff mess for a quick dinner. We’d be back onstage by 6:30 p.m. to finish prepping for the 8:30 p.m. curtain. At 9:30 p.m., we’d reset for a 10:30 p.m. show that came down at 11:30 p.m. There’d be a quick turnaround before a midnight comedian performed until 12:45 a.m. We’d finish closing down the lounge by 1:30 a.m., then it was up to the lido deck for pizza and beer. We’d crawl into bed (ours or someone else’s) around 3 a.m., and then get up early and do it all over again.

For the next three years I “homeported” out of Miami, Tampa, New Orleans and New York City. I travelled all over the Caribbean and even north to Halifax and Saint John. I celebrated three birthdays and two Christmases at sea. I ate incredible food in restaurants on Bourbon Street and from shacks on the beaches in Mexico. I went cave-tubing in Belize, swam with stingrays in Grand Cayman, rode a horse through the jungle in Jamaica and spent the day at a manatee sanctuary in Puerto Rico. We were young, paid in cash and loving life.

In a world that feels so divided today, I’m grateful for the connections I made onboard. I wouldn’t trade my time with Carnival for anything, but I also wouldn’t do it again—not now, anyway. Given the toll on the body and the liver: it’s a young person’s game. †

Jackie Adamthwaite’s career in the performing arts has been a mix of backstage and front-of-house production and performance focussed as well as arts administration.

She is currently Senior Manager of Theatre Operations working for the Vancouver Civic Theatres (Queen Elizabeth Theatre, Orpheum and Vancouver Playhouse). She was a sessional instructor at UVic’s Phoenix Theatre from 2020 to 2023.



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OFF CAMPUS



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Polynesian Dreams

Writer and guide **JENNIFER KINGSLEY**, MFA '10, seen here in Makatea, highly recommends a taking a trip to Polynesia, which stretches from Hawai'i to Aotearoa/New Zealand, to Rapa Nui/Easter Island. See more tips from Kingsley, a National Geographic Explorer, and other travel experts in our feature on page 16.