

My mom lives in Coquitlam, just behind Coquitlam Centre. She moved to this condo about eight years ago, but we lived only a few blocks from there when I was young. Our home was on the other side of Westwood Street, which divides Coquitlam from Port Coquitlam. Mom is in my bubble, and I often spend part of the weekend helping her with chores and errands.

While moving furniture there recently, I found a news clipping behind the couch. The August 2020 article reported on then-Minister of Education Rob Fleming's announcements for the Fall return to school in BC. Without reading the article, I asked my mom if we should recycle it, or if she was keeping it for some reason. She hesitated to tell me ... in fact, she *didn't* tell me.

I asked, "Am I mentioned in the article?" A little sheepishly, she said, "Yes." That was the end of the conversation. It made me smile. Then I went for a run.

I took a circular route, running out to my childhood neighbourhood and back. This path took me along the Coquitlam River, where years ago I spent hours swimming and catching crayfish: memory lane, to say the least. When I got back to the condo, my distance fell short of my target, so I ran around the building to make up the distance. Mom's place is on the fourth floor and overlooks the spot where my run would come to an end. As I approached the end of my run, I looked up to her balcony and the child in me wanted to call up to her, "Mom, mom ... watch me ... can you see me, mom?"

Of course, I didn't call out. But images flooded my mind, images of people – young, old, and in-between – calling out to be seen. These thoughts, and my curious childish reflex, coloured the days ahead. And then, Joshua Whitehead provided a caption and a clarity for my musing.

SO MUCH
SACRED
IN THE
MONTH
OF
JUNE

by

Darren Danyluk

President, BCPVPA



This year's winner of CBC Canada Reads is *Jonny Appleseed* by Joshua Whitehead. Joshua is an Oji-Cree/Nehiyaw, Two-Spirit/Indigiqueer member of the Peguis First Nation (Treaty 1). I picked up my copy on the day the winner was announced. Well into the book, Joshua writes about water and the rivers in his life. Joshua calls the water a 'mentor' and a teacher. In the next lines, his metaphor extends and the water becomes a road, a path ... perhaps a journey or life itself. He writes, "The water is a furious road and the only words we can say to one another are simple: witness me." In the heartbeats that followed my reading of this line, I experienced one of those rare lucid moments when muddy thoughts and puzzles converge into sharp focus and you feel them thrum.

To bear witness means 'to show that something exists or is true.' This need for validation and confirmation is at the core of our existence. And here, in June, we witness a great deal.

Not to diminish Kindergarten Graduation, but the greatest pomp and circumstance is typically reserved for high school. In my experience, high school graduations outshine all other such celebrations,

even post-secondary! And if you happen to be an educator in a small community, you know that the town all but shuts for the grad ceremony. When the guest lists include aunts, uncles, grandparents, and all extended family, that leaves few people available to run the place – the town has to shut down! And gathered together in gymnasiums around the province, witnesses gaze from the bleachers upon hundreds of very young adults, bidding for attention, with nervous smiles that say "Look at me and what I've done! Witness me."

Things weren't made to last forever; they're not supposed to. But we try to fix them in time and keep them alive, these moments. Because they pass too quickly, and are gone before we know it. And this moment of public validation strikes a lasting note that rings for years to come, as I discovered when I resurrected just such a moment after 28 years.

With our daughters nearly ready to leave the nest, our home is larger than needed for just my wife and me. We've begun to think seriously about the next chapter of our lives, perhaps in a much smaller home. Our basement is filled with those items that we can't



THINGS WEREN'T MADE
TO LAST FOREVER; THEY'RE
NOT SUPPOSED TO.

BUT WE TRY TO FIX THEM
IN TIME AND KEEP THEM
ALIVE, THESE MOMENTS.

BECAUSE THEY PASS TOO
QUICKLY, AND ARE GONE
BEFORE WE KNOW IT.

use, don't use, won't use – but cannot throw away. With space to fill, it is easy to avoid the process of weighing the value of things and deciding what is worth keeping. It takes a level of commitment to sort through the history of things, considering each memento, sending some to the landfill. A decision to downsize has forced a ruthless spring cleaning in my home this year.

In my purging process, tucked in behind the wooden bed frame I built in 1979, I found a gift from the Class of '93. While I finally discarded the rustic four-poster waterbed I have been moving and storing for the last 40 years, I put aside the gift for later consideration. The gift is wood, too. It's a homemade clock, embedded in a lacquered plaque, and beneath the lacquer are fifty-five photos of the 1993 graduation class, ironically frozen in time on a clock which hasn't advanced one second for decades. One of the class members created this for me, and I could not part with it.

On a whim, I took a photo of the clock and posted it online with a caption that underscored the remarkable passage of time.

Reactions to my post came swiftly from my former students, each carrying that joyful note of celebration nearly thirty years on. Every June, another day is catalogued for another generation to mark their experience and their achievements. There is no denying the enduring meaning of such witness.

The waterbed went to the landfill; the gift, I think not.

To be sure, the graduates of 2020 and 2021 have experienced unparalleled conclusions to their secondary schooling. More so than ever before, those nervous, smiling faces saying, "Look what I've done!", bidding us to see them, will need this confirmation.

And more than ever before, so will all other players in our system.

In her book, *The Listening Leader*, Shane Safir writes about fostering trust, relationships, and community. She writes about bids for a leader's attention which come from all sides: students sharing successes, teachers unloading a difficult lesson, colleagues seeking support, or parents searching for answers. Safir characterizes these bids as a call for care or attention, a call to be seen and validated. "Even those times that feel shrouded in criticism or negativity: Can you find a bid lurking there?... How [leaders] respond to these offers matters ... a lot."

I would suggest that this is something well understood by the Principals and Vice-Principals in our schools, who have spent the last year acknowledging bids for attention from their communities. More than listening, our school leaders have heard and supported and sustained their communities through one of the most difficult years in recent history. And in the concluding weeks of this school year, one that began with a reimagining of how 'school' will work, our school leaders are conducting a spring cleaning of their own.

As described by Simon Breakspear, a process to capture, cleanse, and weave has been undertaken. What do we keep and refine? What do we discard, and what do we restore? Do we keep the practices



of heightened hygiene? Staggered movements through the halls? What about timetables? Shall we stick with the 'new normal'? Does it better suit students in high school to focus upon fewer courses at a time? Do we keep hybrid models to accommodate learners, some of whom have thrived in this environment? What about collaboration and meetings? Do we continue to take advantage of our new-found technical skills, and continue to meet unimpeded by time and space? We've forged networks more widely flung than before our COVID-19 experience: this must be a good thing, no? Did it come at some cost? Was it worth the price? So many questions, so much listening to be entertained in the busiest and fastest month of the year: AprilMayJune.

I borrowed John Mayer's lyrics, for I believe June's sacred traditions sustain us with the acknowledgement we need to keep moving forward. John Mayer's lyrics go on to say, "By the time I recognize this moment, this moment will be gone." Our school leaders intuitively know this, which is why they moved mountains in June of 2020 to make the Class of '20 feel seen, heard, and witnessed – all the Classes of 2020, regardless of grade. And they will do it again for the Classes of '21.

Before the moments of June 2021 pass, we must bear witness to what our Principals and Vice-Principals have accomplished over the past year because their own bid will be quiet, if not silent. They will never say, "Look at me." Since March 2020, I have endeavoured to bear witness to the dedication, competency, and commitment of our school leaders at every opportunity. As we close the book on this school year, let me end by saying, with genuine awe, "Just look what you have done!"

***Darren Danyluk is the
2020-2022 President
of the BCPVPA.***

