

ENGLISH 390, CITY STUDIO, FALL 2024

PORTFOLIO 2

CLIMATE DISASTER PROJECT + CITY OF ABBOTSFORD

TOWARDS ABBOTSFORD'S SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEM:

FARMING, CLIMATE + (J)EDI

Challenge statement:

Using collaborative storytelling to increase awareness of and support for people involved in Abbotsford's food system who are adversely impacted by both climate change and diversity/equity challenges.

Question:

How can people in Abbotsford gain a more accurate and empathetic understanding of ways that climate and EDI issues affect those involved in the local food system?

Purpose:

To invite people living, working, and playing in Abbotsford to become more aware of and inspired to participate in the Abbotsford food system in ways that support climate stability as well as social and emotional sustainability.

Process:

In partnership with the Climate Disaster Project and City of Abbotsford, students learn effective creative nonfiction writing techniques—specifically the “as-told-to” trauma-sensitive collaborative storytelling method—for supporting sustainability and strengthening community.

Outputs:

We will create a collection of “as-told-to” stories about people's experiences in and hopes for Abbotsford's food system. Students will collaboratively develop strategies for optimally showcasing the stories in the relevant City of Abbotsford “Experience the Fraser” areas. These strategies will prioritize accessible knowledge dissemination techniques that invite readers/viewers to engage with elements of the story that convey respect for sustainability, diversity, and inclusivity.

INTRODUCTION

By Michelle Superle

November 19, 2024

I began collaborating with Sean Holman in December 2022, after discovering the Climate Disaster Project (CDP) via the *Fraser Valley Current*, which ran a series of CDP articles about the November 2021 southwestern B.C. floods.

At the time, I was engaged in my Flood Stories Project and preparing to exhibit the outputs at the Reach Gallery in January 2023. What struck me about the interviews and stories I had collected from Abbotsford farmers who had experienced the floods and the CDP “as-told-to” stories about a wide range of people’s experiences in the floods, was that even though our respective projects were exceptionally unique, there were startling similarities in our approaches, methodologies, philosophies, values, and goals.

Given that Holman and I had independently engaged in an extensive process of research, synthesis, pilot testing, and iterating to develop our approaches to story collecting, these similarities were astounding. The synchronicity led to inclusion of the CDP/*Fraser Valley Current* series in my Flood Stories Project at the Reach.

The rest is history—or more precisely, history in the making. Both in collaboration and through our individual projects, we continue striving to share important stories about sustainability—which, for us, includes not only environmental and financial sustainability but also social and emotional sustainability—in ways that help people understand the desperate gravity of how disastrously our ongoing climate emergency can affect any of us at any time.

But we also aim to provide hope and inspire climate action. That’s why our work is creative, research-backed, trauma-sensitive, and, most of all, empowering for those who choose to share their stories with us.

By the time our collaboration began at the end of 2022, these goals had already propelled me into research focused on “narrative agriculture”—a term and approach that I developed—in service of supporting farmers, agricultural land preservation, and sustainable local food systems. For the preceding seven years, I’d been busy with several large-scale projects. I was developing a rights-based agricultural literacy program anchored with picture books and creative inquiry projects for children in

grades K-12. I was contributing articles to *edible Vancouver & Wine Country* magazine regularly. I had started to write a book about literary representations of agriculture. But it wasn't until the floods that I began to incorporate the lived experiences of farmers and those involved in the food system into my work.

When I did, it was because I believed that portrayals of farmers in written materials are usually problematic. In fiction, farmers are too often glorified or villainized—and their circumstances are almost always oversimplified and outdated. But contemporary news media coverage of the challenges facing farmers is an insufficient means for conveying the depth, breadth, and severity of our farmers' struggles to provide us with healthy, nutritious, delicious food. I was—and still am—in awe of how hard our farmers work, as well as their expertise, innovation, and dedication.

I didn't know it at the time, but fortunately I soon learned that Holman and his colleagues at the Climate Disaster Project share this frustration about climate coverage in the media: “too often there has been a failure to individualize and humanize the consequences of these disasters” and aim to provide “a solution to that problem”.

It's not surprising, then, that their mission has become my own: “We can survive this new age of disaster if we build empathy and solidarity around the experience of climate change. Because story creates community, and community creates hope.”

And that's how, not long after deinstalling my Flood Stories exhibit at the Reach, I joined several City of Abbotsford committees related to food, farming, and food systems. My work with these groups taught me a great deal about what's needed to support a thriving, sustainable local food system—and this includes more and better stories. By engaging with City of Abbotsford employees and community partners regularly for more than a year, I recognized that the “as-told-to” methodology could also serve community goals to achieve a more robust and just food system that supports both farmers and eaters.

Although I came to this conclusion independently, it's corroborated by Danielle Nierenberg of Food Tank, a “think tank for food” that advocates globally for “food system change”. She insists that “food and agriculture systems must be part of any big-picture solution.... sustainable agriculture and innovation are inseparable from building climate resilience”. Nierenberg shared this view in one of Food Tank's newsletters after attending COP29 sessions held at the Food and Ag Pavilion on November 18, 2024.

Nierenberg is President and Co-founder of Food Tank, which “is the world's fastest growing global non-profit community working towards positive transformation in

how we produce and consume food”. It’s heartening to me that this “expert on sustainable agriculture and food issues” is also asking herself, “For those of us who are not farmers, what can we do to help farmers help the world?” This question arose after another day of talks at COP29, after which she concluded, “We need to tell the right stories and ask the right questions. . . . And we need to work locally!” Nierenberg tours the world with Food Tank constantly, listening, learning, and reporting on key issues (and potential solutions) in the global food system. So when she insists that, “To help farmers help the planet, we can’t exclusively wait for global negotiations like COP to fix everything. To recover and rebuild from a climate in crisis, we need to start in our own communities, too!”, I listen.

The stories we’re sharing through English 390 and the Climate Disaster Project are my answer to Nierenberg’s question, my way to help my community rebuild, and your invitation to participate in a local food system that’s not only environmentally and financially sustainable, but also socially and emotionally sustainable for our farmers—and the rest of us, too.

To provide a “taste test” of what’s to come when the English 390 students complete their “as-told-to” stories in the interview portfolio assignment, here are some sample stories in the same style. The Climate Disaster Project’s most recent output, a series of articles that ran in *The Guardian*¹ last week as part of their COP-29 coverage, comprise the first of these.

Next, you’ll find some examples of “as-told-to” stories incorporating the Climate Disaster Project methodology, written by my students at UFV in a creative nonfiction course I taught during the Fall 2023 semester. Some focus on climate disaster, while others are about food in/security. The stories that students in English 390 are developing this semester bring together both of these challenges in powerfully inspiring ways. When they’re ready to share, they’ll provide as much insight and inspiration as their predecessors.

¹ (f you haven’t yet had the pleasure of enjoying *The Guardian*, you’re in for a treat; it’s [“now the world’s most popular and prominent newspaper. With a daily readership of more than 35 million readers, The Guardian has brought a revolution in the news industry. It is awarded the ‘National Newspaper of The Year’ 4 times in the UK for being the most trusted newspaper.”](#)

Finally, to round out the stories in this collection, we're including the series that started it all—the CDP flood stories from the *Fraser Valley Current*.

Stayed tuned for more: we're planning many more collaborative endeavours to come, including article series, museum exhibits, workshops, and more. In all that we do, we're guided by the certainty embedded in CDP's manifesto: "Sharing our experiences can help us feel less alone and bring us hope".

Enjoy these stories, and may they bring you hope.

SECTION ONE:

CLIMATE DISASTER PROJECT COP-29 SERIES IN *THE GUARDIAN*

NTRO article for series:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/nov/11/this-is-climate-breakdown-series-exploring-impacts-people>

Articles:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2024/nov/11/this-is-climate-breakdown-i-heard-on-the-scanner-theres-a-child-in-the-water>

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2024/nov/15/there-are-days-when-the-school-closes-because-children-dont-have-water-to-drink-this-is-climate-breakdown>

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2024/nov/14/this-is-climate-breakdown-greece-attica-wildfires-firefighter>

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2024/nov/13/this-is-climate-breakdown-burkina-faso-mariama-baby>

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2024/nov/14/this-is-climate-breakdown-greece-attica-wildfires-firefighter>

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2024/nov/12/the-sea-was-coming-closer-it-was-so-painful-to-see-my-house-being-destroyed-this-is-climate-breakdown>

LAUREN CLIFT

Abbotsford, Canada | Wildfires in Shuswap, British Columbia, 2023

“I have a big fear of being stuck somewhere. As soon as I heard the roads were closed I burst into tears.”

by Lauren Clift as told to Harleen Dhaliwal

Lauren Clift is from Chilliwack, British Columbia, Canada. She is 26 years old. Lauren is a student at the University of the Fraser Valley. She is an English major focusing on creative writing. In her spare time she acts and participates in community theatre, which is where her social life lies. Lauren was born with Cystic Fibrosis, a genetic disease that results in a lot of mucus in the lungs and also affects other parts of the body. Her compromised lung function definitely has affected Lauren's experience with the wildfires in BC.

It started back in May when my boyfriend first invited me to go camping in the middle of August. I immediately got nervous because I figured even if there weren't wildfires in the area, it would be really smoky, kind of getting closer to the interior. So, a couple of weeks before we went camping, I was on the weather app constantly looking at the air quality, seeing what it was like and if it was going to be safe because I knew we were staying in a tent.

I have a lower lung function than most people. I'm at about 70% of lung function, where a full healthy one goes up to 130% lung function.

We were camping at Magna Bay in Northern Shuswap. It was the first time I ever stayed there, and we were only there for three days before we had to leave.

When we were driving up there on the Wednesday, the closer we got, it just got smokier and smokier. It was in a really unhealthy area, but I also knew it might clear up. We were gonna see how it went. We were supposed to stay there for six days.

The first day was okay. As soon as we got there, Mandy who owns the cabin, said we're not on alert yet but we're keeping our eye on the Firewatch and all that, because there were fires a little

way away at Adams Lake. It was pretty smoky where we were but we weren't in a danger zone at all. There was no wind so the fire wasn't coming towards us. It was just kind of smoky.

The next day when we woke up, I could tell my lungs were a little bit off. But I still felt pretty okay. We noticed we could see across the lake at that point. We were like “oh, the smoke’s clearing up”. “That's awesome, maybe we'll be able to stay the whole weekend!” And we had a lot of fun.

Honestly, the first two days we played lots of games and had a normal camping trip.

The third day [my boyfriend] Nik and I woke up in our tent, and it was so windy outside that it had blown down on top of us. The neighbors came out and were telling us that we should probably think about packing up and leaving. They were, because the winds had changed and the fire was now coming towards us.

It was so windy. There was ash all over the top of our tent. It was really scary. I had to walk up like a little hill to get from the cabin to our tent. I just couldn't catch my breath, I was so out of breath. That was pretty scary. I honestly really wanted to leave. I was like a ball of anxiety. I had said to my boyfriend, maybe we'll wait a couple hours and then we'll talk about it, but I was pretty ready to leave.

We all decided we were going to keep an eye on the alerts and see, because our area wasn't on alert yet. We played a card game to try and get our minds off of it. Everyone was at the cabin, and we were sitting inside in the cabin for about maybe half an hour.

When I walked outside it was orange. The color of everything had changed. It was so dark out, and so smoky. I went to Nik and said, I think we should leave, I don't feel very safe here, and we started packing up. As we were talking about that, Mandy read out a report on her phone that said they had closed the road. The only road out, which was terrifying. I have a big fear of being stuck somewhere. As soon as I heard the roads were closed I burst into tears.

I tried to hold it in, but I looked at Nik and he put his hand on me and he was like, are you okay? And I said “yeah, I'm just gonna go up to the tent for a little bit,” and as soon as I turned my back, I just started sobbing, I was so scared, so I just went to the tent and I called my mom and I said “mom the roads are closed, we're gonna die”.

It wasn't so much that I was scared about the fire because I knew they would open the road. The reason they had closed it was so that everyone at Adams Lake, where the fire was really bad, could get out so that the people weren't blocking the road. So, I knew they would open it if we needed to be evacuated because we still weren't on alert yet, but just the fact that we were stuck. There's one road out of there and we were stuck. That was so scary to me.

Then I was probably in the tent for an hour crying and people came and checked on me and my boyfriend came and checked on me. He said "you know what, let's just pack up the car and we'll drive there" My dad was on the phone and he said "tell them you have a medical issue and you can't stay and they probably will let you through the roadblock".

We packed up everything, and everyone else at the cabin did too. By the time we did that, they had opened the road again because we were now on alert and had to evacuate. There were fire trucks and ambulances going by on the road. It was scary.

We were really lucky that when we left the road wasn't super backed up, but as we were driving out, the fire was up to the road. We drove through the Scotch Creek Bridge, the only road out of Shuswap. They had sprinklers all over the bridge so that it wouldn't burn down because then everyone would be stuck. There were firefighters on the side of the road.

I have pictures of the fire, literally right beside the road. I could have reached out and touched it. It was so scary. If you looked up in the mountain, there was fire up to the sky. It was huge and tall, and that wasn't even the worst of it. This was just the little fires.

We got out of there and we were able to get away. If we stayed two hours longer, we would have had to be evacuated by boat and would have had to leave all our cars and all of our stuff. We were really lucky we got out when we did.

I remember driving home. It was a little smoky in Chilliwack, where I live. But driving out of that smoke and getting closer to Chilliwack and there's the sun, there's blue sky. It was like, I can breathe; I can see the sky. It didn't feel like you were stuck in this smokiness.

It definitely, at the time caused a lot of anxiety. I have chronic anxiety but I don't often experience anxiety attacks or panic attacks. There are certain things that trigger it. I could name on one hand the things that trigger it, because there's not many. That feeling of isolation, being

separated from people or separated from where I need to be and being in danger just set me off. I was in anxiety attack mode for a couple hours.

Climate change is always something that's scared me. I remember being in elementary school and learning about the environment and they kind of had this really negative attitude of like, we're all gonna die because the Earth is gonna explode.

Yes, it's a scary thing, but it doesn't have to be taught like this. Like the literal fear, and having this happen, obviously is a really scary experience and the fact that the wildfires are happening every year is terrifying and it brings back that childhood fear,

It kind of helped when we were driving out and watching all the firefighters there fighting the fires. It kind of gave a little bit of hope. People are fighting for this. Maybe not like the big bosses who can actually change this, but the little man is there. They're fighting the fires; they're doing all these things.

I've kind of avoided looking into climate change because it's been something that scared me. Having hope that we can actually change and fix some things really helps with wanting to learn about it. I don't really know what can be done, but I think my part and the part of a lot of other people is educating ourselves on climate change.

I hope that the government and the military and the BC firefighters are taking steps to prepare instead of just hoping it won't happen, and they might be already but I don't know much about it. I think for people just being aware of it and trying not to travel during those times like we did.

I also think one of the things that stressed me out, and this is on a much smaller scale, was that I was like people are gonna call me an idiot for driving into Shuswap when there was a fire. There's so much judgment from people. You're just trying to live your life and do things and if you're not doing wrong by anyone, and if you're doing the best to keep yourself safe and also take care of your mental health... I think people need to take care of their mental health and need to live their lives and do what's going to make them happy as long as they're not doing wrong by anyone else. They shouldn't have judgment for that. Obviously do the safe thing, but also take care of your mental health.

Also, just little moments you see with people give me hope. Even in a disaster, people come together and help each other. Especially in a disaster, I should say. People come together, and

they help each other. There are moments where you kind of forget that people are so good, communities are so good to each other and in those moments of disasters like through COVID, through the floods, through the wildfires, you see people coming together and helping each other.

Just looking out for each other and treasuring and cherishing those moments where people come together as a community gives a reminder that there is good amongst all the anxiety.

Cindy Castro

Abbotsford, Canada | 2005-2011

“There would be days when they didn't have enough money to put food on our plates. They couldn't even speak a single English word.”

By Cindy Castro as told to Madeline Beerwald

UNCRC Articles 2, 4, 24, 26, 27

Cindy Castro is a fifth-year student at the University of Fraser Valley in Abbotsford, Canada born in 2001. Cindy is majoring in English along with minoring in Philosophy, and she is the youngest of three siblings. She is first-generation Canadian, because her parents immigrated to Canada from Mexico in the early 90s.

Her upbringing was a difficult one, but one she has been able to overcome through hard work. Her parents' sacrifices have taught her how to be humble, independent and successful, and she radiates just that. Cindy is on track to meeting her long-term goals only because her parents role modeled how to persevere through difficult times.

I've been exposed to many difficulties since I was a very young age and the misfortunes that my family had to endure are continuous to this day. I come from a family of immigrants, Mexican immigrants. So this is the base bone structure of all the struggles that my family has gone through.

I am the last child to live in my house without my siblings around anymore. It's become a financial struggle to maintain a stable income to have somewhere to live. Both my mother and father moved to Canada in 1992 from Mexico and started from absolutely

nothing, no place to live, no job, and no car. They couldn't even speak a single English word. They just had three brothers to help them get going at a small family-owned pizza business in Downtown Chilliwack.

There would be days when they didn't have enough money to put food on our plates. My snacks consisted of crackers and refried beans. My room consisted of chipped paint and molding corners. My entertainment consisted of finding animal shapes on the tile patterns of the bathroom floor.

It was a continuous complication we went through because we had a small shabby apartment with not enough bedrooms. Some years, we wouldn't have a Christmas, some years we would have to walk in the blizzards to get to school because we couldn't afford snow tires on the family vehicle, and some years I lost my friends because I couldn't afford bowling.

Some days when my parents struggled with putting food on the table, I would go to sleep for dinner. My parents let me go to friends' houses a lot for playdates and sleepovers only because I assumed it was one less mouth to feed. I think I knew that, but as a kid I was always excited to go to friends' houses for sleepovers and dinner.

Dinner at another home was always something I thought was so extravagant and something I would never have at home. This includes junk food. And I will say, sometimes junk food was my dinner at home, like half a bowl of Kraft dinner and sliced up hotdogs. But junk food at a friend's house that *wasn't* for dinner sounded alien to me. For example, I've never tried medium rare elk until going to a friend's house, and I learned I liked sauteed Brussels sprouts only in bacon fat with chopped bacon and onion bits. I never knew food could taste so rich.

At home, my parents did their best. Breakfast was usually scrambled eggs, ham and a tortilla. On days when it was hard to come by eggs, it was toast with butter and cinnamon sugar, or beans and tortillas with a cup of milk or water—whatever was in the fridge. My parents couldn't afford hot lunches that all my classmates were part of. It was very rare for us to go out to eat or even get McDonald's Happy Meals. I missed out on a lot of happy meal toys.

To this day, they still struggle to pay off debts they owe. They have done everything in their power just so I can understand the importance of dedication and sacrifice. My parents had to use their Canada Child Tax Benefits, after becoming Canadian Citizens, on supplying food for us because their jobs were not able to maintain a stable income to feed us as kids. This is the reason why I needed to pay for my own schooling. So, I got a job really young and worked full-time and overtime as a barista for four years.

The only reason my parents' jobs were low-income was because their Bachelor degrees in Dentistry were denied when they applied for a Canadian Visa to move here. They spent more years than I can count on one hand, and money to get those degrees. But

they still abandoned their hard work and success to move to Canada just so their children could have a better opportunity at life.

I definitely feel a lot more independent having gone through a low-income upbringing. I moved out in 2021 with my fiancée, only to move back in with my parents two years later because the cost of food, rent and tuition was too much for my part-time serving job to handle. I am glad I had the experience to move out with my fiancée. Because of that, I have definitely grown a profound sense of independence.

Even though my family lacked some of the luxuries when I was a kid, I owe my life to my parents because they have shown me what true sacrifice and dedication means to them. One of my major goals in life was to pursue a degree in university, and graduate debt-free. I am proud to say, with the help of scholarships and my hard work, I am nearing the finish line to meet that goal.

I couldn't have done it without my parents' example and support.

STEVE HARTWIG

Abbotsford, Canada | Yugoslav Wars, 1992

I would go into the garbage and all the food, sometimes bags of flour—complete, closed bags of flour, never opened. You know, eggs, I would pick them out of the garbage. My buddy Andy and I, we would take meat, like cooked meat, ham, bacon, that was just thrown in the garbage, and we would take it all out. We would take it and give it to the locals.

...the criminal organization... sell all the goods and the food on the [black] market. So these individuals like “Mom” [the cook] would have to make money somehow, which turns people to violence, turns people to prostitution, it turns people to survival mode....

by Steve Hartwig as told to Kalie Holford

Universal Declaration of Human Rights Articles 1, 2, 25, 28, 29

Before serving as a soldier in the Yugoslav Wars in 1992, Steve Hartwig grew up in a military family. He describes his youth as “an indoctrination process of sorts” with a normality ascribed to enlistment and an expectation to do so himself, which he did.

Now a student in his final semester at the University of the Fraser Valley, Steve is pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts with focuses in Creative Writing and Visual Arts. His primary interests are investigative journalism and video production. Although he says visual art is personally challenging, he has plenty of experience overcoming obstacles and engages with challenges regularly, whether that be in his youth, his time in the military, or his adulthood pursuits in competitive athletics.

A father of four and a Canadian Armed Forces veteran, he brings a unique perspective to his studies and life. He is now a “self and systems advocate for veterans’ rights, mental health, and PTSD,” and a survivor of “the abusive practices and traditions of the Canadian government.” He highlights the importance of family and a personal “willingness to evolve,” and he speaks candidly about his experiences, offering insights into constructive ways to channel situations and adversity into positive change.

I was deployed overseas in the former Republic of Yugoslavia right at the start of the Yugoslav Wars. The United Nations wasn't prepared. Canadians even less so. As a young, kind-of-trained but inexperienced soldier on my first deployment, I had really big expectations, and I'd grown up with knowledge of Canada's reputation as peacekeepers and soldiers, and I wanted to do my part.

I was stationed in an area called the Serbian Krajina, which was an enclave within Croatia, and our goal was to protect it. I was part of a group tasked with providing security for a large warehouse complex with the understanding that the United Nations were going to come in and leave their international aid and food, medicine, clothing, whatever's needed. They did so, and we were told to keep that perimeter secure. The local countryside was pretty decimated by the war. And so in a lot of cases, the water was polluted. They didn't have food, all the animals were killed.

Shortly after they left, we were told to withdraw to about a kilometer away to give space, which we all thought was kind of weird because we're supposed to protect it. As we watched a convoy of vehicles come up, we recognize[d] that a lot of their vehicles are civilian vehicles. And they went in and loaded up all of the supplies and left. We'd already been in country for a month or so, and a lot of guys already had incidents with some of the individuals driving the vehicles, and they recognize that they were the local criminal organization. We were told that soldiers are to just shut up and do our jobs. Let the, you know, higher-ups deal with everything. And so we watch them come and go and load up, and everybody was kind of a little at odds with the situation. We didn't know what to do.

And then over the next days and weeks, we started to hear that the mafia has a relationship with the United Nations where they come in and they take all the goods and they take them to the black market, and they sell them to the local population. And the relationship, it's very common now, as we've known with other wars, but at that time, it wasn't very well known. The United Nations would go into an area and choose the crime group, because they already had the ability to control an area.

The idea that we were providing security for the mafia, so that they could steal all the international aid and sell it and make profit and become rich and powerful, was a real problem. We bought into this propaganda that we're this great nation, and here we are, what we thought was committing crime. This situation in particular was probably a foundational fracture, I guess, in the system that was established by us. That started to create a kind of air of rebellion within our Canadian Forces. First on small levels, individuals speaking out, and then the behavior started to increase.

As we became more rebellious and disobedient, we started to notice different things within the operations of our battle group. One that set our platoon [in] particular off was our cook. [He] was a member of the Canadian Armed Forces, and so there were a variety of issues that he brought to our camp. He would, at the end of the day, take all of the food and throw it out. And in most cases, it was, you know, cartons of eggs and butter

and flour, and it was perfectly fine food. Knowing that many of the locals from our interactions didn't have much in the way of food, it created a very large divide that soon became violent actually, because the cook was doing what he thought was right, and everybody had problems with that and created this tension that led to kind of several violent incidents between members of the soldiers and the cook.

I was quite vocal about it. And I had had several instances where I was told to basically shut up. And so my first deployment, and here I am causing ripples. I would go into the garbage and I would take all the food, so sometimes bags of flour—complete, closed bags of flour never opened. You know, eggs, I would pick them out of the garbage. My buddy Andy and I, we would take meat, like cooked meat, ham, bacon, that was just thrown in the garbage, and we would take it all out. We would take it and give it to the locals. That allowed us to build a relationship with some of the community because they didn't have certain things and we didn't have certain things. So we learned to barter trade, which was illegal by our standards and by our rules of engagement and employment, but we felt it was very important that we establish positivity in the community. Some humanity had given us humanity.

[The cook] was then removed. We hired a local woman, local mother, that was once a cook. We very quickly adopted her as a mom. She was a single mom. Her husband was killed in the war. She worked in the local hotel, a famous spa actually, but it was completely decimated in the war. She lost her job, became impoverished, like everyone else. She started trying to describe how this process worked.

These people, from our perspective the criminal organization, come in, and they sell all the goods and the foods on the [black] market. So these individuals like Mom would have to make money somehow, which turns people to violence, turns people to prostitution, it turns people into survival mode, which as soldiers we were there to prevent. We had so much money because the UN would pay us, and for us in a country like that, you know, everything was paid for so soldiers would give her fifty, one hundred, two hundred Deutschmark, which would be the equivalent of thousands of dollars here today. And then she would go and make sure her family and friends and everybody in her community could go and buy stuff. In effect, we were supposed to be protecting this international aid that was free to be distributed and once the community, the mafia, takes it[...], then we're using our money to give to people like Mom, who then would go and buy off of the black market what they needed. So it just became this cycle that created a lot of animosity and anger.

[It] created this, for us, kind of a major wound of sorts because we were told we're peacekeepers, we're here to provide security and safety and shelter. And now all of a sudden we're not. The experience taught me at a young age how dishonest our leadership is, elected or otherwise; you know, the economic, ideological, and political goals are often way more important than the environment. We reached a place—I think I did, I can't speak for others—where I learned hate for the first time on an epic level, not

on a literal level, but that's probably the first time in my life up to that I ever really experienced hate.

There's all the experiences of being in a war-torn environment, society, or a country breaking down or destroying itself. There's certain sights and smells, smoke and fire, very common. There's, you know, six, eight, ten, twenty houses on fire or large portions of an area are burning. It's a unique mixture of fresh kind of morning air and diesel from our vehicles and our generators and burning things and I can close my eyes and be back there, the fresh air mixing with our diesel engines, the smell of Mom's apple pie, the sweet smell of dead things, all mix into this sort of romantic memory. I always talk about it like it's a curry, like it's just bubbling. And you get a little bubble of one smell. You're like, "Oh, that smells good. Oh, that's horrible." And that—that's kind of what it's like. But it's also thirty years on, it's almost like a portal that I have learned to control. In the beginning, I didn't, but through time and practice, I was able to do that.

Memories and history fade in a way, and it's these little triggers that pop up from time to time, and I have that all the time. I'll hear something. I'll see something. I'll smell something. It takes me back to—as I wrote—a moment of my history, and the foundation of a lifetime of trauma that I wish I could revisit every day. There's not a day that I think I've had in my life since that I haven't wished I was back with my soldier friends in that environment.

I feel like I left a part of myself there.

It's forever changed me. I saw firsthand how we as a species, in our further desire for warfare—like the impact that that has on our planet is massive. You know, the destruction of our environment is a byproduct. But with help, consistent work, and I guess, the willingness to evolve, as I've tried to define it, so that individual incident, you know, it's part of kind of a much greater fabric—so it's become a life-altering experience.

Future generations are also inheriting the planet. So they're inheriting the power—potential to address climate change in a more holistic and more healthy way. That's where my hope is—that the rising generations will continue to learn from the mistakes of the past.

I think when it comes to food security or just safety in general, it's an individual process as much as it is a community or societal process. We can do something about it holistically. But it's just going to be a different kind of war.

Gwen Settle

Abbotsford, Canada | 2001/2023

“A large part is teaching people about the shared value of eating local food. If people could only become more aware of the value of local food; how important it is not only to the economy, but to their health. And it tastes so much better when it's local.”

by Gwen Settle as told to Grace Jager

UNCRC Articles 24, 26, 27

Gwen Settle is 79-year-old woman who can be considered a “jill of all trades.” She has worked a variety of jobs, including the Canadian Navy, freelance legal secretary, HR, and many more. Over the past 20 years she has focused on volunteer work, specifically with the Abbotsford Farmer’s Market. In her free time, she enjoys reading and swing dancing.

Well, in the early 2000s, we had difficult time. My husband had passed away in 2001. My daughter and I were living together, then she ended up expecting my granddaughter. My granddaughter was born in 2003. We were getting some food through the food bank and some of the different community programs, which helped out quite a bit because we just didn't have much money coming in. That's why I always make a point now of donating to the food bank. Every year, if nothing else, I donate there.

On the other side of things, I got involved with the [Abbotsford] Farmers’ Market in 2004 by volunteering there. A pilot program* was started between the BC Farmers’ Association and the provincial government. This is the Nutrition Coupon Program, which is funded through the government and other people or organizations who donate. Each farmers’ market that registers to be part of this program must partner with a community group in their area. In Abbotsford that group is Archway Community Services (formerly Abbotsford Community Services). Participants must be registered with the community group. In Abbotsford we have three groups: Best for Babies, Seniors, and Asian Seniors. There may even be an Immigrant group as well through Archway.

What happens is participants they're given a set of coupons during the season. Each of these coupons is worth \$3. It used to be nice to get \$15 for the coupons each week, but now it's up to \$27 worth of coupons each week. Most of the coupons are for fruits and veggies, cut herbs, dairy, eggs, and nuts. Two of them are also for fish, seafood, and meat. Now they've added one where you can get honey as well. So, it's quite a variety that you can use these at a designated farmers market. That has brought the access of fresh local food to so many people.

When the program first started at the farmers' market, I was the one who managed the program from the market's perspective. That included at the end of the day collecting all these coupons, seeing that the farmers get paid for them, submitting the coupons and associated paperwork to the association, and so on. Now, that I'm retired from the farmers' market, and I am a low-income senior, I'm on the other end of it and getting the coupons myself. So, I'm at the market almost every week again, but as a customer instead of as a volunteer.

Using these coupons to access local fresh produce, meats, honey, etc. is absolutely invaluable. I mean, it's just unbelievable. And it's very important. Especially during these hard economic times, many people are taking advantage of being able to access good quality local food. Also there's a lot of refugee groups, particularly Ukrainian and Afgan groups here in Abbotsford, that are also included in this year's program. It has just exploded so that it's almost overwhelming for some of the farmers with all these people.

When I started assisting with the first year of the program, there was something like \$12,000 worth of coupons that we received. When I retired [about a year and a half ago], I think it was over \$65,000. It's well over that now. There's such a demand because people can't afford food now.

We have to educate people too. Just because, say, a carrot doesn't look perfect, that doesn't mean it's not as delicious as ever. You're not going to like everything you get. I mean, nobody likes everything. So, it's like, if you get a vegetable you don't like, instead of getting rid of it, just donate it or give it to somebody who can use it.

What I loved about the market too was seeing little kids going along, just munching away on carrots or other veggies just raw. They had the chance to talk to the farmer and find out okay, how is this grown?

A large part is teaching people about the shared value of eating local food. If people could only become more aware of the value of local food; how important it is not only to the economy, but to their health. And it tastes so much better when it's local. It really does. Also, try and buy things in season. It's understandable if you don't have the money. I mean, sometimes you don't have a choice. But if there's some way that you do have a choice, then try and go for the local and the healthy food, because it makes such a difference.

It's just what we eat and our attitude. I say it's attitude as well because so many people just sit by themselves. They don't get out, they don't socialize, they don't eat properly, even myself. Sometimes I think, "Oh, it's just me here. I don't really feel like making a meal." And that's a hard thing to combat. But if you can even pick up a carrot or a piece of celery, nibble on that. Throw a little peanut butter on the celery. You know, you get your protein and your veggie and eggs. I love eggs, fresh eggs, and I get them from the farm. So, it's all knowledge. Education.

* “The Farmers’ Market Nutrition Coupon Program began in 2007 as a pilot project operating in each of the regional health authorities. The Ministry of Health began funding the program in 2012. The program successfully expanded from 2012-2014 and has been in full operation since 2015. It has continued to grow since and now serves over 85 communities and reaches over 18,000 families, seniors and pregnant people from over 10,000 households in BC.” <https://bcfarmersmarket.org/coupon-program/how-it-works/>

Kris Foulds

Abbotsford, Canada | 2023

“As a child who had never been without [food] in any way prior to that, I thought, *Wow, this can happen?*”

by Kris Foulds as told to Grace Jager

Kris Foulds is the curator of historical collections at The Reach Gallery Museum in Abbotsford. She grew up in Vancouver, moving to Mission when she was 13, and Abbotsford when she was 19. She has a passion for history and is a mother and wife.

When I was still living in Vancouver with my parents, I would have been about nine, I think. My dad was injured at work. And in those days, the protections for workers were not as great as they are today. We were living in a one family home in East Vancouver, my mom was a stay-at-home mom, because my sister was only three at the time. And my dad was the sole breadwinner in the family. So, when we had to live on workers’ compensation – that’s what it was called at that point, we didn’t have very much money.

My mother really did her very, very best to make sure that we had enough to eat, but it was... it was scary. Sometimes you know, on a good day, we got hamburger in our pasta. It was not great, you know. My mother did things like instead of the fresh milk, you know, milk from the milkman that we had always been used to, she got those giant boxes of powdered milk.

First she tried to make us drink straight up powdered milk. And that didn’t work because that’s just atrocious. Then she tried sneaking it into milk, mixing it. We still figured it out. But yeah, not to be able to have milk. It was terrible.

I can remember the smell of the powdered milk. It just doesn't smell like milk. It smells tinny. That smell of it just triggers me. Like there was some recipe that I tried as an adult that they suggested using powdered milk in, and I thought no, I don't want to do that. But okay, I'll try it anyway. It was one of those wartime cookbooks that I found at work in the museum. I'll try it. I'll try. It's supposed to be wonderful. Well, as soon as I opened that box of powdered milk, it was like, No, we're not doing that. Nope, nope, nope, nope, nope.

The things my mother did to contrive meals that were slightly different... One of the first cooking shows I ever remember was the "*Galloping Gourmet*", and it was this weird Australian man. She would watch the show and then try to make things out of almost nothing and pasta. Some of the strangest things came out of her kitchen then.

As a child who had never been without, in any way, prior to that, I thought, wow, this can happen, you know, we can worry about whether we can get a cereal I like or I have to have the puffed rice again. I'd always come home from school, and I could always have a glass of milk. And I could always have some bread and peanut butter, you know, and I could just get those things for myself.

But then the rule became, "No, you can't because your sister needs the milk. She's little." You know? And there isn't peanut butter. "You have to save the bread for your dad's lunch tomorrow." Those kinds of things. There was management on everything. It became very different.

Well, it was just... you know... I guess I was a spoiled kid. I mean, he [my dad] made a good living otherwise, but just honestly, you know, the, the powdered milk and the puffed wheat and just eating the same thing over and over again, because it was cheap.

It lasted I can't remember exactly, but between six months, six months, and a year. So, it was a good long time that they were trying to work out managing to support a family of four on his disability [money]. We kind of got used to it. You know, I kind of got used to it, at least. Sometimes I said "I just don't need dinner tonight" rather than eat the same thing.

You know, they [my kids] had the ability to say, "No, I don't want to eat liver." "No, I don't like peppers. I don't want to eat those." "No, I don't like mushrooms." You know, they could each pick three things that I would never make them eat, and they could have something else instead. But for me, that wasn't an option.

I'm really worried about it. I have adult children. Two of them now are homeowners, one of them isn't. And, you know, I don't know that he'll ever be able to get into the housing market unless, my husband and I say, "Well, we'll buy a camper and go travel, and we'll give you money for a house, and we'll just come by the wintertime when it's too yucky to camp". [This generation] really needs help from our generation.

Then the amount of [debt] from student loans. I have a grandson who's probably got \$90,000 in student loans—just to be able to have a career. So, when he starts, and his earning potential is pretty good, he's going to have that huge debt behind him. So that's going to take years before he can be advancing. So, he's going to be in his 30s. I would hate to be 20 today, I really would. I really would hate to be.

Something needs to change. Yeah, you know, as a matter of need, you know, rather than, them paying, \$1,800 to have a basement suite, just a decent basement suite. So technically, then, you know, they could be living with us and not paying anything and saving for a house. Like I just I just think that maybe we need to examine how we work as families as societies as communities, right?

I think it's also kind of a western mindset. You know, the first thing I wanted to do when I could was leave home. And our kids did that as well. But they, most of them, have been back at some point, one reason or another. I'm surprised the number of people that disparage the big multigenerational homes.

I just think that would be perfect, you know, have a house big enough to have my son and his partner and their daughter living with us. I just think that's the best idea on Earth. I don't know how to make it better. Yeah, we just have to acknowledge it and then change what we're doing. Because it's not working.

