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THE SOUL OF VANCOUVER

VOICES FROM THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE





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VANCOUVER

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DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE

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INTRODUCTION – BY JEAN SWANSON

What community raised a totem pole in Oppenheimer Park to honour those who have died, and those who continue to struggle within it? Which community sewed a banner with 92 beautiful panels to remember its missing and dead women? Where has a community fought for 7 years to get a community centre, camped out for months to get a waterfront park, and then had to file a human rights complaint to get access to the park for people with disabilities? Which community struggled for harm reduction drug policies and won the continent's first safe injection site? Where did people gather to begin the On-to-Ottawa trek that was the beginning of unemployment insurance and the 8 hour day in Canada?

Where does it happen that if you “Disappear for a day or two/someone will send out a search party for you” (Kelly on the purple scooter); that “sweetgrass/Fills the air and erases the stink of the chicken factory and crack” (Leith Harris)?

It's the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, of course, and today, more than ever in its history, the Downtown Eastside community is in danger of being wiped out. Developers are moving East, snatching up land for condos and speculating with residential hotels that are the homes of 4000 Downtown Eastside residents. New condo development is outpacing social housing development for singles by a ratio of 3 to 1.

While the hotel rooms are often decrepit, they are the last stop before homelessness for low income people. Hotel room rents are spiralling upwards, and new stores, like the store for dog clothes on Cordova St., are opening up to serve the condo owners. Condo owners flood city council with letters trying to keep needed social housing out of the area. Others want a freeze on the services that low income folks need.

While governments say they are building housing, they are not building nearly enough to house the 4000 hotel room residents and over 600 homeless people who call the community home. The hotels that the province bought are not additional or suitable housing. Most are still a 10 by 10 foot room with a bathroom down the hall and no self contained kitchen. The 5000 units of social housing in the area give people a safe and secure base so they can put down roots, contribute to the community, and nurture their families, as thousands of Downtown

Eastiders already do. Residents are clear that new social housing, as well as higher welfare, pensions, minimum wages, decent jobs and health services are what the community needs to become healthier, according to the Carnegie Action Project's report, *Nothing about us without us*.

How can politicians justify allowing our historic community, the soul of Vancouver, where people are accepted for who they are, to be obliterated? They do it by ignoring the community, not seeing the humanity, believing the stereotypes that the Downtown Eastside is no more than "four blocks of hell," bedbugs, slumlords and drug dealers.

What is the community? That's what this book is about. Poetry has a long tradition in the Downtown Eastside. Diane Wood has been organizing poetry nights at Carnegie once a month for 4 years. In the 1980s, Downtown Eastside Poets traveled around the province reading their work. Read on and learn about the community we want to save, and its people, and then join us in working to save it. Check out <http://ccapvancouver.wordpress.com> to get involved in the action to save the neighbourhood that is the soul of Vancouver.

Hideh, Hideh

To the Creator, a.k.a. God, I say Na, Megwitch

To the Coast Salish Peoples, whom the Creator
In all the Creator's wisdom gave this territory,
I say Na, Megwitch. And although I am not of this territory,
Never-the-less I say unto you, Aneen.

My name translated is bitter sweet and I'm middle aged. Some of my friends don't like me saying this, as though it means...they're middle aged.

As usual I'm an outsider, and you know what –
I found a home in the DTES with other outsiders.

In this community you can be arrested for painting a daisy,
or a beautiful water colour scene at the old Woodward's building.
In the end, the daisy won out, but the struggle continues on.

I love the Downtown eastside community because of its beauty and its strength, in its refusal to SHUT UP and its insistence upon justice.

For example, the missing women. No one hears our voice, except to perpetuate stereotypes. Missing women. It takes a Yankee to say "serial killer". THAT voice is heard...ours is not, although we have been saying this for some time...and more.

Comfortable women bleed for the Montreal women. They raised monies for chiseled stone to sit upon at the old railway station at Terminal and Main.

At Crab Park, we have a boulder, a ROCK.

Yes! And we are strong in our insistence upon Justice and our refusal to be silenced.

I love this community because of its beauty. It sees beauty, value and worth in those who have been deleted...as human beings.

I need this community because it gives me strength and sees my worth.

Na, Megwitch, "X", 2001

SANDY CAMERON

The Downtown Eastside Is The Soul Of Vancouver

Colleen and Diane were talking to me about the beauty of our Downtown Eastside community, and how important it is for people in other parts of Vancouver to see that beauty and realize that there is a strong community here.

Now we're not a pretty community. We don't have a lot of gorgeous flower gardens or trees like the ones in Stanley Park. We do have Crab Park, the gardens in Strathcona, the colourful murals, and the old heritage buildings. But when I use the word beauty in regard to the Downtown Eastside, I'm not thinking about nice looking streets. I'm thinking about the people.

It's the people who make our community beautiful,
and people make our community beautiful because they have soul.
The Downtown Eastside is the soul of Vancouver. You know about soul food and soul music. Well, I'm talking about soul community.
Many of us have lived through hard times - and survived.
We know about pain, and in our pain, in spite of our pain,
we reach out to each other and help each other.
That's soul.

They say bodies are attracted by pleasure, but souls are attracted by pain.
We are strong from the struggles we have endured.
We have learned to respect each other, and not to be judgemental.
We have learned to work together to make things better.

In June, 1998, a beautiful totem pole was erected in Oppenheimer Park to remember those who have died in the Downtown Eastside, and also to remember those who have survived.

Some of the carvers who worked on the pole didn't live long enough to see it finished, but their spirits live on - in the totem pole, in Oppenheimer Park, and in the hearts of the people of the Downtown Eastside.

The poem, "The Oppenheimer Park Totem Pole", touches on the pain in our community, but it also shows the courage and perseverance that is here, and the hope that someday justice will prevail.

That's soul.
You can't measure it with a ruler,
but you can write a poem or a song about it.

The Oppenheimer Park Totem Pole

It seems to me
that when someone dies
it is the responsibility
of those of us
who are left
to offer caring
for that life
for that death
in the intensity
of the love
that reaches out
from the unendurable loneliness
of our separation.

So did First Nations people,
with their friends and allies,
raise a totem pole
in Oppenheimer Park
on June 6, 1998,
to remember the community
of those who have died
in the Downtown Eastside,
and so did they rededicate themselves
to the struggle
for hope and for justice
from one generation to another.

Cannibalism In The Downtown Eastside

The monster of gentrification is devouring the Downtown Eastside, Vancouver's oldest community, except for First Nations communities which are much older. This same monster has already devoured most of the downtown peninsula of Vancouver, with Burrard Inlet on one side and English Bay and False Creek on the other. The monster is insatiable in its hunger for accumulation. It is market-driven which means that it is profit-driven, and a city controlled by this monster "is not so much a place for people to live in and call their own, as it is a machine rationally and effectively designed for making money." ⁽¹⁾ The market-driven monster of gentrification thrives on the war of all against all, to use the words of Thomas Hobbes, and as Shakespeare said even before Hobbes:

"It will come
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep."
(King Lear, Act 4, Scene 2)

Businessmen today talk about acting like cannibals when they devour each other or each other's companies. Gentrification - the pushing of low income residents out of their community so that developers can reap maximum profit from high land values and high rents - is a form of cannibalism. It is war, and as the term gentrification implies, it is class war. Referring to gentrification in the Downtown Eastside, Lief Eriksen wrote, "The market cannot abide such expensive real estate being used by the poor." ⁽²⁾ The Downtown Eastside is a tiny David compared to the Goliath of development determined to build the corporate city, and the community is in crisis. An old-time resident said, "One day they're gonna come in here with a bunch of army trucks, and ship us all out to the sticks like POW's."

However, the Downtown Eastside has a long history of struggle for respect and human rights. In the foreword to the excellent book *Hope In Shadows: Stories and Photographs of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside*, Libby Davies, our Member of Parliament for Vancouver East, wrote that in North America most low income inner city neighbourhoods have been destroyed, but that has not happened in the Downtown Eastside. Then Libby, who has been fighting for our community since the early 1970's, went on to say, "The only reason (our community hasn't been destroyed) is because the people of the Downtown Eastside fought back. They

asserted their right to live, to exist, to have hope, and to have a future. Their story is one of resistance — one that deepens the value of what community and survival really means to the lives of its residents and the place as a whole.”

Never have the people of the Downtown Eastside been so united as we struggle to save our community from the ravages of gentrification. The Carnegie Community Action Project (CCAP) has just finished a report which covers the first stages of its visioning process. This report, entitled *Nothing About Us Without Us*,⁽³⁾ clearly shows how important the Downtown Eastside community is to the people who live here. It is the people who make the community, and the caring, non-judgemental, enduring residents of the Downtown Eastside reach out to each other and build community. As more Vancouverites understand how strong and creative our community is, they will join us in the fight to save our low income neighbourhood through affordable housing, adequate income, and necessary health services. The Downtown Eastside is the soul of Vancouver.

(1) *The Developers*, by James Lorimer, pub. by James Lorimer & Co., 1978, page 79.

(2) *Vying for Space: Neo-liberalism and the Criminalization of Poverty*, an unpublished essay by Lief Eriksen, 1999.

(3) “*Nothing About Us Without Us*” is the motto of the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU). VANDU kindly gave the Carnegie Community Action Project permission to use its motto for the title of the CCAP visioning report.

Sandy Cameron came to the DTES in 1965 and has been one of its staunchest champions for social justice ever since. He’s been a logger, prospector and teacher, and a writer who has contributed to the Carnegie Newsletter for 20 years. His published works include Taking Another Look at Class and Sparks From the Fire.

BOB SARTI

With the Downtown Eastside, looks can be deceiving.

A lot of people say they don't come down to the neighborhood because it looks scary, with all sorts of disreputable-type people on the streets.

I tell them they won't bother you if you don't bother them, and that, despite appearances, Hastings Street is a very safe place for visitors. The street people are wrapped up in their own affairs and they don't have time for you. But a lot of outsiders aren't convinced. They see the crowds when they're riding by in a car or on the bus. And they see the scare stories in the news media. That's as close as they get.

They have no idea what they're missing.

When I was growing up in New York City, there was a part of town that my friends and I wouldn't go near, either. It was Harlem, the uptown neighborhood for most of Manhattan's blacks. As white kids from downtown, we thought it was just too scary. We preferred staying in our all-white ghettos.

I never went to the Apollo Theatre. I never saw Ella Fitzgerald or Dizzy Gillespie. I barely knew they existed. I never went to readings by James Baldwin or Richard Wright or Maya Angelou or any of the other writers who descended from the "Harlem Renaissance." That was a flowering of black identity and pride that has had immense impact on North American culture.

The closest I got to that other culture was Allan Freed's rock'n'roll shows at the Brooklyn Paramount theatre in the mid-1950s. We got to see the Five Satins and the Flamingos in all their doo-wop glory. We were a sea of young white faces, no blacks in sight. Except up on stage.

I had no idea what I was missing.

It's the same with the Downtown Eastside. There's an astonishing flowering of culture going on here. You could call it the Downtown Eastside Renaissance. Maybe it started with the Downtown Eastside Poets back in the 1980's. Maybe it started in a dozen places, at a dozen different times. But it's here now. There are so many writers, artists,

musicians, performers striving to express their identity and pride in the neighborhood that I couldn't begin to name them all. This book is just a taste of the astonishing range of creativity.

So it's time for people to get out of their cars and off the buses, screw up their courage and take a closer look at what happening here. Because it would be a shame if they missed it.

Bob Sarti was a long-time resident and volunteer in the Downtown Eastside. He now lives on Hornby Island. His new play, Bruce — The Musical, about Bruce Eriksen and the history of the Downtown Eastside, will be performed at the Russian Hall, as part of the 2008 Heart of the City Festival.

DIANE WOOD

Trash

We're th White Trash, th Drunk Indians,
th Niggers, th Spics & Half-breeds
We're th ones U call Stupid Ugly Lazy Dirty Good-4-Nothing
Only Good 4 One Thing
We're the ones with Fetal Alcohol brothers and sisters
Cuz Mom couldn't take it any more by th time she had the little ones
We're th ones who die on dope
Cuz it would cost more 2 keep us alive with AIDS
We're the women who die because we're sluts whores evil
The reason 4 all th sin in th world howdya like them apples?
We're the men who'll die
Screaming "FUCK" on th street corner
And to every person they've ever known

We're th ones whose bodies are scarred with yr hate
And our hate 4 ourselves
We've had lovers who couldn't make up their mind
If they loved us or wanted 2 kill us
We've tried 2 kill ourselves
We've wished we were dead
We've carried hatred like a plague
We've worn our anger as armour
We're th ones who don't get a job
Or we're th ones who when we get a job
U tell us 2 go back 2 where we came from
We're th children U spanked punished taught touched fondled
abused molested locked out locked in
and wished had never been born
We're th ones U called Stupid Ugly Lazy Dirty Good-4-Nothing
Bcuz we are poor
And Bcuz U were poor
And no birthday present U could buy us
Will make us forget our scars

If "th best things in life are free"
howcum this is the "worst" parta th city?
We sang "Freedom's justa'nother word 4 nothin left 2 lose"

And found our freedom in th buzzed-out eternity of drugs
We've watched our neighbourhood get worse
We've watched people get paid for things we would've done
And have been doing for each other, anyways

We are dying from an insane RAGE
At having to watch the people we care for die
We have hit th breaking point
Where we decide which memorial we will go 2 this week
Bcuz there are just too many
...and we don't wanna lose what belief we have that...
th belief we have in... What????
That there's any reason 2 continue praying
That we're still alive cuz of some cosmic lottery
Or that we're dyin from AIDS and OD's as punishment
4 th road we took when all roads lead 2 Main
And if U could help me find that vein
I could get outta here again
Outta my head and th ghosts that haunt me
Away from the glittering world that taunts me
2 get more buy more take more
2 feel more like I "should" instead of how I feel
Cuz how I feel is BAD and I don't like it don't want it
And have spent all my life trynta lose it
Somewhere
In some bar in someone's arms
If I close my eyes will U make it go away?
We're born alone and we die alone
And what legacy do we leave behind?
Where are th future generations?
And if anybody finds them, can U tell me where they're going?
Is my map any kinda map for anyone 2 get anywhere?
It's DOWNTOWN here it's DOWNTOWN there

And if I could find someone somewhere
Who doesn't wanna see me broken or beaten or on my knees
Could we move 2 somewhere where none of this shit exists?
Or will we just stay here in the here-and-now
And pick up th shit and th bones of our loved ones?

Listen

Listen to us
2 all of us who aren't trynta sell dope on the corner,
who have our arms out 4 a handshake or a hug, not spare change
Listen to the laughter in a sunny park,
The hi's & hey's & hello's When friends intersect
And the kisses goodbye
Smckx That's love & community
& people who look you in the eye when U pass them by

If all U hear is Up Down Rigs & Threes,
Then yr not listening

Goodbye

Say goodbye 2 th DTES as we know it
The yuppies buyin condos don't wanna see us
Don't wanna know about sandwich & souplines
When they shop at Nesters
Don't care what a great paira shoes U scored at 1st United
While they're buyin a leather jacket 4 their dog
Won't B looking 4 a dollar bag at Sunrise, or in any dumpsters
Don't wanna know where 2 get a free haircut
when they're shoppin 4 a wig
And they flinch when they see us
Th people who made this community what it is
Doin what we do
In broad daylighte

Diane Wood lives and makes art in the DTES. She speaks up for outcasts and labeled people everywhere. She encourages others to write their stories with lively monthly poetry cabarets at the Carnegie Community Centre, and published The Return of the Downtown Eastside Poets in 2005. Grief has transformed her life from a failed attempt at a fairy tale to a voice of dissent.

COLLEEN CARROLL

The Hood DTES

I sit here watching the action.
On the corner of Hastings and Main
Under the dome, beyond the pillars,
Here the heart of my Community pumps.

Out pumps writers, painters, and poets,
Out pumps sculptors, actors, directors,
Out pumps scholars, musicians, and chess champions
Out they come, Creative, talented and inspiring.
All heart firing.

We are told we are the poorest neighborhood in Canada.
Yah, sure, they once said that of Greenwich Village
Poverty is relevant, like Crime.
Poverty here is depressingly wicked oh so true.
Just two paydays short and this could be the life of you.
Some choose to drown this reality in drugs and booze.
But not everyone here chooses to lose.
No this is not what all choose.
They may be crippled and broke,
But they have talents there determined to use.
Broke but not poor, I like to say,
They immerse themselves in humanity's gifts all day.

The majority, you don't see when passing through the hood,
What you see is those accomplishing impressive feats,
Like survival living on Vancouver's streets.
Trying to escape the daily grind
With only the next fix on their mind.

No, my friend, you don't know my hood,
Here most are busy making community,
The kind that values humanity, as it should.
We celebrate those gifts that money can't give.
We celebrate those gifts that a lack of money can't take away,
We do this in every conceivable way.
We don't do this for any tangible pay.

We do this to build the community we celebrate every day.
Yet when you pass the corner of my hood,
You seldom see it, as you should.
You see the petty crime, indeed you do,
The results often make the place look like a zoo.
But the crime you see here I'll gladly trade any day.
For the crimes of streets such as Wall, Howe or the Bay.
There perpetrators all go home at the end of the day.
And folks drive past where they live and collectively say.
What a wonderful neighborhood,
What a wonderful life, what a wonderful way.

My hood people pass their time.
Some not so wise, others for all man kind.
So much hidden talent here is an inspiration for all the world to spew,
If only the rest of mankind actually knew.
It is our secret and we seldom tell,
Being content to let the world think we live in virtual hell.
"More for us." Isn't that the capitalist way?
After all it's what got us down here today.
So content many in the hood, work quietly away.
Towards what counts and matters to mankind at the end of the day,
Their legacy will be there without the scorn,
For much good in humanity here in my hood is being born.

So shudder as you drive past.
Give a strange glare that is long to last.
Shake your head with terror and scorn.
Behind the walls some of our society's best in culture
is being conceived and born.

This is my hood, outside, ugly to be sure,
Inside, with a heart of gold clear and pure.
Where many talents abound, And solid friendships are found.
Yet the truth of this hood's reality is hidden well from view.
Time will prove and time will tell, how much and how well.
Of Community we are rich beyond measure,
Experiencing the talents within my hood is a continuous pleasure.
This hood's talents and inspiration a blueprint for the nation.

Ode to the Hood II

I love this "Hood", it's the best by far.
Folks are friendly and warmly greet you on the street.
Whenever you happen to meet.

Where people gather, care and meet is at Main and Hastings Street.
I live on the corner of Hastings and Main.
But friends from another life think me quite insane.
Folks in my building are friendly and most are nice.
Some on the streets even tend to flaunt a little of their vice.

Down here, you can see what you have and you know what you've got.
They don't hide behind high hedges and walls their guilt and their rot.
You know when you're down and out they care.
Because they have all at some time also been there.

I live on the corner of Hastings and Main.
Where "crime" is open and showing for view.
So one has warning as to what to do.
Not like some other places where crime runs like cream
Because it's not so openly acknowledged or seen.

In my "Hood" the real swindlers/ slavers aren't to be found.
Only people trying to pay the bills abound.
Sometimes the real crooks drive by in black windowed limousines.
With a police escort they pass by all stingy and mean.

In my hood we are known by name.
Not living on a scale driving one totally insane.
Buildings aren't so tall you can't see the light.
The streets so empty you can't go down them at night.
The parks are all happy places. They are not there just for show.
They are places where everyone is welcome and all like to go.

My hood is a place where parking lots don't abound.
Where foot leather is in vogue pounding the ground.
To the market, Doctor, or to a show.
Walking is the way most of us go.

The living room of our community is its biggest delight.
It is the Carnegie Community Centre,
Where we pass many a day and night.
At painting, poetry, pool, pottery and plays
We are able to spend our days.
Ballroom dance, disco, karaoke, the library,
Games rooms, outings and all.
Means our neighborhood is constantly having a ball.
The Carnegie Newsletter, HUM 101 documentaries
And learning centre keep us all well informed.
With bingo, ball games, yoga, opera, concerts, dances and movies
our lives are adorned.
Our minds are well nourished our tummies are too.
With cuisine un-surpassed, that's not just my point of view.

However it is the love of the people, and how it abounds.
That makes living at Main and Hastings, the best place around.
For together we are strong and powerful and whole.
In a world not so kind my hood is the best place to know.

Colleen Carroll worked in BC's logging industry for 17 years, until the dirty air and the chemicals ruined her health. Like many others, she's in the DTES because WCB refused to recognize the damage done in her workplace. Her poetry is witness to the suffering in the world due to imperialism and corporate greed.

STEPHEN LYTTON

Stay Home

This is a quote I heard on the radio a while back:

“Attitude is the paintbrush that colours your life.”

Another one I read some time ago was, “Stand up for something you believe in or you’ll fall for anything.”

It’s become very apparent to me that it may take decades or even generations to change attitudes about our community (the Downtown Eastside) in spite of all we’ve done to share its beauty.

Yes! We have problems but so do other communities. The only difference is, in the downtown eastside it’s visible, unlike other communities all across this nation where it’s mostly behind closed doors.

We are will continue to address the issues on a daily basis and we are doing our best [thank you very much!] But most of the problems occur when those of you who don’t live or reside in our neighbourhood come into the area seeking a cheap thrill... or to just cause trouble.

Prime examples: sex offenders; sex trade users; drug dealers and users; abusers; those who prey on babies, children, women – killers especially. We’re just a playground, even a dumping ground. The savage reality is that they or you just don’t give two shits – you come and go as you please, when & wherever you see fit.

The horror of it is the injustices we’re left with in the aftermath of your doings or fantasies. To pick up the pieces of ruined and shattered lives, missing lives – I could go on and on – all the result of you not giving a shit.

Go ahead! Run and hide but I know you’ll be back. Stop the slaughter in and of our community: Quit shitting in our house and backyard. It’s a sure guarantee that your actions wouldn’t be tolerated in almost any other community (and that includes yours!). So why dump it in ours? Or haven’t you read, seen or heard that we have our own shit to deal with, let alone whatever you bring into the ‘hood.

If you can’t be decent with us, Stay Home.

Why I Love the Downtown Eastside

First of all, let me ask you some questions.
What is it that you wish to capture?
Is it the essence of the moment?
Or the character – heart and soul of the Downtown Eastside?
Or is it about the human spirit
and its will to survive in spite of all the challenges it encounters?
What will you take from your experience?
I love the neighbourhood, my community, my home since 1992.
Dubbed the poorest postal code in all of Canada,
my community has taught me so much about heart and courage
over the years I've been here.
On a personal level I have learned about character.
My own weaknesses and flaws, but my own strength as well.
That beauty still unfolds
though pain and death continue in my hood.
We will surge forward.
Many times strangers, family and friends united in our plight,
Sharing the humanity.
All are welcome here, regardless of where they come from.
Not one turned away.
Here you see the reality of life.
I am touched deeply by those struggling.
I am encouraged to carry on.
The Downtown Eastside is the very heartbeat of the hood and its people.
My dream is that it remains deeply devoted to the struggle for justice,
not injustice.
But because the whispers of those who have now passed on continue in
the wind,
their voices must be heard and the struggle must continue.
Their plight and our plight is connected.

Stephen Lytton was born with cerebral palsy. He went to Residential School from 1961 to 1974. He moved to the DTES in 1992 and loves the character, heart and courage of this community. He has learned much about the human spirit and its will to survive in spite of the challenges it encounters. He enjoys poetry, creative writing, acting and the people he meets.

PHOENIX WINTER

Make Yourself At Home

I moved into the neighbourhood
With my things
Left them
At the bus shelter
For passersby

The little peaceful plaque
On the wooden bench
With welcoming words,
“Pull up a chair
In a shaft of sunlight
Come sit with me
Enjoy this house.”
A small plastic yellow
sunflower, strewn
A touch of cheer.

This is all I have
Sunshine yellow and clear
glass walls
Bright blue sky
warm cement and
clean brown wood

And I will share.

Something I miss

Getting up in the morning,
Sunshine streaming
Through open windows
Gently baking bared skin

This is the Eastside
Blinds are drawn
Shutting out all those other
Windows like eyes
The Empress Hotel
With its dirty 2010 Banner
Stare of the red brick wall
Of morning
Cops in the alley
Siren alarm clocks

DTES
I actually miss you.

Are we on the cusp

Of greatness here
Or infamy?
The Downtown Eastside
Known as far
Away as China
A mayor's excuses
All Canada
Has visions of
Drugs dancing in their heads
Dirt and squalor

But they are blind
To the compassion, understanding
and safety in street family
with honest warts

We are all welcome here
Give us
Your tired, your hungry and poor
We might spit them out haggard
Or scare them silly
Or give them an accepting
Place to come back to
Time after time

It's safer here
Than other parts
Of Canada.

Phoenix Winter has been transplanted from the wilds of Ottawa where she belonged to the MPD collective who published their own zine. Her work has appeared in Tales from the National Capital Region, Box 77 and Soapbox. As the only female in People on the Verge comedy troupe, which was broadcast on Rogers, her piece was considered "too patronizing" to the men. She is grateful to the DTES for its support.

DEMITRI HARRIS

Home

This is my co-op
And I'll never leave
Emile on my floor
Along with little Steve

If you like to eat, sleep
And play basketball
This is the place
Where you can do them all

The best in the world
Is the Four Sisters
Except for skinheads
And bike stealers

One of the best views
Of the waterfront
I don't wanna brag
But I'd like to be blunt

Some people don't like it
It's good enough for me
Those are my thoughts
About this end of the city

I Love the Hood

Yo! My name is Demi and I am 11 years old. I like to listen to rap on
my radio.

I love my mom
I like my friends
When I grow up
I'm gonna get me a benz

Everyday
I go to school
This crazy job action
Is really cruel

Livin down here
It ain't no joke
A whole lotta people sniffin' koke,
A whole lotta people smoking dope,
It's hard to cope –
People offer us some
We say nope

In Chinatown
My mom likes the smells
And she likes to eat
Them things in shells

The restaurants in Chinatown
Are really nice
My favourite meal
Is chicken and rice

My neighbourhood rules
It's really cool
You better not take me
For a fool

Some things are bad,
Some things are good.
That's how I feel
About livin in this hood.

Demitri Harris has lived, attended school, worked and played in the DTES all his 18 years. He's never wanted to move and can't imagine wanting to live anywhere else. He is now studying Human Kinetics at Capilano College and hopes to transfer to UBC next year.

LEITH HARRIS

Sonnet

Waterfront Road East & Main Street
Create a Real Available Beach

Once in Vancouver, a girl found her home
After traveling the world far and wide
She'd seen wondrous sights but none with such pride
She swore that never again would she roam
Once she searched for a place to write a poem
Trudged north on Main from the Downtown Eastside
She heard waves, smelled fish, gazed at mountains, cried...
For joy! An oasis to call her own

Once just muddy flatlands, dirty and stark
This oasis hadn't always been green
Folks got together, demanded a park
They squatted in tents, held rallies and schemed
For a place kids could play and dogs could bark
A beach, flowers, trees... they sculpted their dream

She camped with her son in one of the tents
The campfires, stories and laughter were fun
They helped organize shows and kids' events
And in the end they actually won...

Crab Park. A true citizens' victory
This verdant paradise nestles between
Helicopters, train tracks and industry
But eco-density threatens this scene

As gulls, eagles, rainbows circle above
Condos encroach, organized sports invade
This fragile park built on landfill and love
Our peace and solace in the midst of pain

Now an old woman, her poem-home come true
Though thankful, she fears the fate of that view

Vision

I remember a pitch-black night, drizzle, a campfire, two umbrellas, waves lapping muddy shores. Under the steady rhythm of droplets, my new friend and I were quivering, a little from the chilly autumn air and a lot from laughter. He was telling me about his Grandma's first visit to the city. He'd told her that the W on Woodward's stood for welfare. Back up north, Grandma told everybody there was so many people on welfare in Vancouver, the office was the size of a department store.

It was 1984, mudflats at the foot of Main Street. My new friend and I were doing our security shift at the CRAB (Create a Real Available Beach) tent city. The air hung thick with that special, fishy, ocean fragrance. We were about to call it a night. All 23 tents were quiet. No one would be causing disturbances, in the rain, at three a.m.

Suddenly the clouds parted and the full moon shone onto the inlet like a spotlight. Out of the water, on the shimmering, golden pathway of moonlight, came a dark figure carrying, as if offering, what I thought was a slithering fish and my friend thought was a wriggling puppy. We watched the figure approach. We stood up. Then, just as suddenly, dark clouds covered the moon and the image disappeared. No. We'd had no stimulants other than thin, weak coffee and a few smokes (tobacco).

The very next day we learned that the Port officials agreed CRAB Park was a better idea than industrial development. Landscaping would begin come spring. We victoriously took down our tents.

To this day, my old friend and I meet, occasionally, at the now sandy beach surrounded by grassy hills and shady trees. We remember the mud and drizzle and wonder at that generous vision.

Love in the Downtown Eastside

Love in the Downtown Eastside?
There's those slobbering romances
Between three-day millionaires at the Mardi-gras parties
Some of those odd couples have stuck it out for years together
Through good times and horrible times

That's love

There used to be two young men friends
One of them could see, the other was blind
They laughed happily as they walked about
The blind man's hand perched on his friend's shoulder

That's love

A tall pale bag lady used to roam the streets alone
Ranting and raving curses mixed with pearls of wisdom
One day as she cursed and cried, a small dark woman approached her
Barely reaching her waist she embraced her
They talked together
Within a block after parting the bag lady was shouting again
But smiling

That's love

Mornings at Oppenheimer – the soft fragrance of sweetgrass
Fills the air and erases the stink of the chicken factory and crack
A Downtown Eastside elder offers a cleansing smudge
To everyone regardless of race or profession

That's love

People gather and march on February 14th each year
To honour the women who have died in the Downtown Eastside
Friends push friends through the streets in wheelchairs or shopping carts
Spirits move amongst us and within us

That's love

We live in the Downtown Eastside
We know many of our neighbours,
We make each other laugh,
We love our children
Twice on the sidewalk,
I saw a person stick a needle into another person's neck

Maybe that's love

Leith Harris has been a proud member of the DTES community for over 20 years. She's proud of her 2 sons, her friends and her neighbours who have managed to survive and thrive in this unique and endangered neighbourhood.

BUD OSBORN

Insight Into Injection

the fight for Insite
began in a political/rhetorical atmosphere
of depraved in difference
regarding overdose deaths and pandemic emergency

horrifying ghosts of human beings
calling radio talk shows and actually telling me:

“why don’t they just string barbed-wire
around the Downtown eastside
and let them infect each other to death?”
or
“the only good junkie is a dead junkie”

comments like those heard in Nazi Germany

I remember one welfare week
eleven years ago
sirens screamed lights flashed red and white
all day all night

one hot afternoon that same week
I met a friend of mine
on the corner of cordova and main
she’s a first nations woman and activist
who told me when I asked
how she was
that her family was gathering
to make another crucial decision

her cousin had fixed alone Wednesday evening
in an SRO room
and when her husband returned
found her dead on the floor
he made a noose
with a long piece of cloth hanged himself
and soon was dead

and because the couple had an infant son
the family was gathering
to determine the best disposition
for the suddenly orphaned child
and this entire and tragic situation
might well have never happened
if INSITE was open

but as my friend and I were saying goodbye
a flame inside me
fueled by grief and rage
like a fierce spontaneous combustion
flashing through my nervous system
and roared in my head like a psychic explosion

because of another
because of too many
because of an unnecessary
overdose death

yelled
two words repetitively in my head

No More! No More! No More!
of this heart-breaking family-shattering community-diminishing
pain of overdose deaths

I immediately ran from that conversation
to see mark and liz and kirsten at the old Portland hotel
and with dave diewert ann Livingston
and several others
planned a day of action
we pounded 1,000 crosses into oppenheimer park
blocked main and hastings with a heavy chain
and distributed statistics of misery
to commuters unable to get to work

1,000 crosses memorializing just three years of overdose deaths

a cross is a symbol of political execution
a cross is a symbol for social revolution

and from that afternoon
the battle to save lives was declared
the battle to save the lives of those
so any others wanted to die

and from that afternoon
to INSITE'S opening
we've never ceased in our efforts
to save lives and bring peace
against the war on drug addicts
 war on the truth
 war on the most
physically and mentally vulnerable human beings
 in our courageous community
and because we wrote
and because we spoke
and because we protested
and because we created
an immensely successful
injection site alternative

we achieved a facility unique in our history
a beacon of hope for others beaten crazy
in drug war corrupted North America

we began to transform
that death-dealing rhetoric
with a space made for dignity life and community

we made out of no way
a way for real care to take place

the word vigil to me

means bearing witness
to our own powerful history of resistance

means bearing witness
to all those we've known
who've passed

not as victims or losers
but as transcendent martyrs
still bearing witness to our common efforts
keeping vigilance upon our accomplishments

our revolution in consciousness

now Insite is again under siege
with federal government/DEA conspiracies

so, this prayer
for a place that really saves lives
this prayer
for the means and strength
 to defend
 to protect
 to sustain with whatever it takes
a most beautiful concrete expression
 of care for all of us
a prayer for those who gave their lives
 for this
a prayer that have those hearts hardened against us
 relent and approve
a prayer for those blinded by fear
 and their own vested interests –

that they may see Insite as the beginning of hope
not only for those who need it most
but because everyone suffers
when compassion is undone

Bud Osborn has been a poet and social activist for nearly 40 years. A former director of the Vancouver/Richmond Health Board, he was instrumental in founding such harm reduction organizations as VANDU (Vancouver Area of Drug Users) and INSITE. He has published five books of poetry which include Lonesome Monsters, Hundred Block Rock, Keys to Kingdoms, Oppenheimer Park, Signs of the Times (both in collaboration with artist Richard Tetrault).

MARY DUFFY

Gup Guy Cha

I don't need no Gup Guy Cha
To fall in love with you
Give the oyster back her shell
Give the bear back his balls
'Cos I don't need no vial of
Sweet flying aphrodisiac
All I need is one single drop
Of your true and bitter spirit.

Gup Guy Cha

I fell in love with the lady from Toisan
She sang sad songs and poured
A cup and a cup and a cup
From her bottomless bottle of bitter wine

Gup Guy Cha

I fell in Love with the man wearing a cowboy shirt
To reclaim the word of his Interior Salish People
A gentle warrior who sees as much
Beauty in death as there is in life

Gup Guy Cha

I fell in love with a woman
Whose voice even makes a Hallelujah sound sexy
She could have worked for a 1-800-number
Instead, she decided to become a gospel singer

Gup Guy Cha

I fell in love with a comedian
Itchin' and scratchin' and sayin'
"Those bedbugs don't bother me
So why should they bother you?"

Gup Guy Cha

I fell in love with the squatter
Who pitched her tent under the stars
You can join her – just bring your own butts
to her smokin' only zone

Gup Guy Cha

I fell in love with a man
Who dropped me like a hot hash brown
To marry a Kentucky fried bride
Umm-mm-mmm – finger lickin' good

Gup Guy Cha

I fell in love with Sweet Marie
Cos she knows that we can't live on water
And loaves of bread alone.
Uh-oh no.. we all need some kinda candy

Gup Guy Cha

I fell in love with a dragon-lady
But didn't respect her gifts
I took and I took and I took
Until her treasure singed my soul.

Gup Guy Cha

I fell in love with a Holy Family
Mother, Father and Son
Holding creation like wild pink salmon
Glittering and wriggling in the palm of one hand.

Gup Guy Cha

I fell in love with you:
Chinatown / The Downtown Eastside
I'll give up my pride

Get down on my knees
Ask you to be my groom and my bride
Cos' I don't need no Gup Guy Cha
To fall in love with you.

During the writing of Vancouver Moving Theatre's shadow puppetry play on addiction "We're All In This Together" Wendy Chew told us stories of "Gup Guy Cha". This is a tea, "cha" made from boiling both the male and the female "Gup Guy" which is highly prized as an aphrodisiac by both men and women. This is a love poem for the Downtown Eastside writers – you know who you are.

Mary Duffy grew up on Red Island, Newfoundland until it was resettled when she was six. She found community again working as a librarian in the Downtown Eastside, Strathcona, Chinatown, and Britannia.

TUI HILL

We Are All Related

The downtown east is a side of life which lives with despair and destruction. The seeds of desperation grow in a putrid soil of pissshitsnot-spitcum and gum nicely spicely mixed with crushed food, plastic bags, rags and styrofoam cups. Grim doorways hold sofas loafing drunkenly, sunkenly offering respite from the midden of the alleys. Umbrellys broken and blankies ragged drape makeshift shelters, veiled smoking shooting faces seeking oblivion, hiding from the keen mean eyes of the law. Would you say hell?

Some people would. And with good reason. Seasons come and go and the downtown eastside remains stained with false hope, dope, flash trash and smashed lives. It seems dreams of another life are unattainable, feeble and unreal, unrealisable. Take a posse of suits, a crew of journos, burning to get a glimpse of degradation, a seamy desire to titillate their senses, give them the taste of the wasted lives. Omigod. Something must be done. Something must be seen to be done. Vancouver, top ten liveable city. What a pity, such a shame. Such a tainted hood.

Who knew? If the shoe fits Foreign tourists who bumble in, stumbling on the litter, fumbling with their cameras, are horrified. Where are we? Did we just disembark from that ocean liner, that ark of money and comfort, moored complacently at Canada Place, the face of the city, the welcome mat that ushers in the beauty of the Pacific North East...sorry West. Blessed by mountains and trees, a multicultural society and sophisticated cuisine. What is this place? Face it. Every city has its dirty secrets.

Would you be surprised to know that love exists here? Fun exists here? Intelligent conversation and elegant manners? Talent and charm amidst the harm? Kindness and care amidst the fear? I'm sure you would. But, how could this be? Well, surprisingly, hope springs eternal in the breast of the downtown eastside. The beast of addiction does not kill the soul. The holes filled with heroin and crack come back thirsting for another chance, a dance in the sun, a vision of another world. Are you mental? You gotta be to live here.

What would you know, in your fancy house, in your soft bed? With your red Beamer in your two car garage. With your children in private

schools, swimming pools, and your vacations in exotic destinations. Why would you care?

Well the short answer is this. We are all part of each other. Without us you would not know how lucky you were. Without you we would not know how false the world is. Together there is potential for change. People are people, a collection of skin and bones. Sin and toenails. Meshed in a web of life. We are all connected and we need to be together. We need to heal each other. Where hope exists we won't take nope for an answer. The downtown eastside is an inspiration, a celebration of adversity, an inner city of pity where Russian roulette is de rigeur, your turn Sir. Your Highness. Pull the trigger, we all bleed. We need to build it, for surely they will come. What's that you say? We're already here and waiting. We are all related.

Born in Taranaki, Aotearoa. New immigrant in 2004, inspired by so much courage, Arohanui to all my friends.

PAUL NOSCOTTI

I Luv the DTES

I luv the sidewalks
I luv the long talks on the corner
Luv the architecture and the neon
I luv the long talks on the corner
In front of the Carnegie
I luv the Chinatown market. Ho Ho.
I luv the gutter smells, curbs and pathways.
I always luv the sunrise and the skies in the DTES.
It's where I spend my time.
I luv it when the traffic goes by
I always feel alive in the DTES.
In the DTES it's where I reside.
It's got atmosphere and resources galore.
Come visit the DTES and see what's in store for you.

FRANK F. BRAUN

Poetry Night in the Carnegie Centre

It costs nothing to enter.
The Downtown eastside is my favourite part of the city;
modern and old and Oh, so pretty
Many of the beautiful old buildings have been restored.
I can walk around for hours and never feel bored.
The food at the Carnegie Centre suits me fine
and is probably more nutritious as at the fancy restaurant they call
 Cloud Nine.
There are many pretty girls here and they are not cold.
I only regret I am so old.
But I am glad that now I have the time
to write something now and then and make it all rhyme.

Frank F. Braun was born in Europe during the war and came to Canada at the age of 20. He discovered the Carnegie Centre in 1983 – learned to play chess there. He heard Robert Service's poetry on the radio, and has been looking for his footsteps ever since.

SHARON KRAVITZ

Great Beginnings: A Proposal

There is a new fund that contains approximately 10 million dollars to clean up the Downtown Eastside in time for the Olympics. 10 million dollars to clean up the neighbourhood for a game, well if you're really serious, let's try this. Keep the money in trust. Do some genuine community organizing and start with gathering organizations with a little bit of resources that work directly with the community like the Neighbourhood Helpers Project, Carnegie Community Action Project and the Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House to work in partnership with residents to ask every single person living in social housing, SROs and on the street, what they want to do. What are you good at? What do you dream of doing? How can we make this place safer, healthier, together? What are you willing to do to make it happen? What am I willing to do? Then we follow through, no more talks, no more process.

We listen. Then we respond and support each other in making this neighbourhood a healthier, safer place for the people who live here, not for people who are coming to visit for two weeks, and not the condo dwellers who have capitalized on the neglect, but the people who have spent their lives in this community, the kids who have grown up in this neighbourhood, the Chinese clans and societies that continue to gather in their spaces on Hastings Street amidst the chaos. Real change doesn't happen if people don't have a stake in change, if the only people that are part of the discussion, are people who have been neighbourhood mouth pieces for 20 years, City Staff, developers and others who are acting in the best interest of people who apparently can't speak for themselves.

If you respond to this, I don't want to hear anything less than how can we get started or a correction on the figures of the fund. I don't want to hear that I'm passionate or naïve. I just want to hear that you're serious, serious about real change, about really asking people what they want, rather than assuming. I want to hear that buildings like the Heatley block won't be demolished for a Library that should go in the oldest part of Strathcona School (which is slated to be demolished) because kids in this neighbourhood shouldn't have to walk to a highway (Hastings Street) to go to the library, and that we won't destroy two more beautiful old buildings. I don't want to hear about zero displacement anymore, because clearly that's not happening. I want to hear that Stamps and

Maclean housing projects will remain affordable for the families that live there. I want you to do what you're paid to do, facilitate change and listen.

Also, you might want to hang on to that \$10 million, you might need it in 2011 for the New Beginnings fund.

For the Downtown Eastside

I fell in love with you when I first moved here 16 years ago.
I felt taken in and accepted by you in a way that I had never known.
You believed in me, you showed me how muddy the world is,
that I have a great capacity to give,
and that I have a strong voice and I have a right to be heard.
You were human scale in a sea of towers, you were warm, awkward,
unpredictable, crazy, generous, desperate, caring and harsh.
I felt at home with you, I know you better than any place in the world.
I have an intricate map of you in my head, deaths, protests,
memorials, celebrations, clinics, restaurants, phone numbers, streets,
who owns the different parts of you,
and who wants to claim some, but not all of you,
because not all of you is marketable.
I see how you suffer, I suffer too,
I watch all these people that call you home, suffer.
They don't leave you, maybe they don't want to, maybe they can't.
I have had it easy with you. I know that.
I will never know what it is like to walk the sidewalks of you
with such vulnerability.
I organized a parade on your spine, Hastings Street,
I drew pictures on your sidewalks with people aged 6 to 70.
I painted with others on plywood lining your streets,
made music with others in your parks.
I have loved you because you let me,
I have loved you because you have shaped me,
you have taught me about commitment
and I have loved you because you don't fit.
You don't fit in this city of beige and glass,
with yoga asses sealed in lululemon pants,
art fucks coming out the yin yang, lefties that are actually conservative,
and an entire city comatosed, anaesthetized by the ocean,

the mountains, the rain, its own prettiness and privilege.
We are the Valley Girl of Canada and the Downtown Eastside,
well you, you're a wise guy, you don't have a lot of money,
didn't really care about it much,
people mattered more, justice mattered more,
you hold our stories, our ghosts, you know the truth.
The Valley Girl with her asshole older boyfriend with money don't want
you around anymore,
they want to kill you, they want to kill everything about you that re-
minds them of their humanity, of their roots.
You remind them that they built their empire at the expense of all the
lives you have seen destroyed
all the people that you held that no one wanted to hold,
you remind them that they really are small town
no matter how hard they try.
If they get rid of you, they can maintain the illusion of a world class city,
but your ghost will haunt them when they exist as a shell,
a city with no memory,
and filled with droids in the same pants, living in faux-heritage duplexes.
I will miss you when you are gone.
I won't miss you suffering, I want your suffering to end,
I want you to know what it feels like to be honoured for who you are,
to feel healthy
and to not be asked to fit into some hole
that will never fit because you are too big.
People are working so hard to save you,
and I don't know if I can help anymore,
or if I ever did, and sometimes I wonder if I made things worse.
I have been talking about you for years,
defending you, speaking about your value,
helping care for and be with people who were suffering
on your sidewalks, in your parks,
in your buildings.
I am tired now, as I imagine you are, fighting for the right to exist.
Everyone is trying to change you, make you look shiny,
hide the suffering,
put on your handsome clothes and a brave face,
the Olympics are coming.
I will stand next to you when they come
and we can give them the finger together.
Love, Sharon

SEAN GUNN

The New Age Asianadian

Inside then, I was whiter than white.
Outside then, I was too damn yellow.
Inside then, I was too uptight. Outside then, I was too damn mellow.
When I was so much younger, and they sent me off to school,
The teachers there, they taught me how Britannia rules.
I wasn't all too hip, and I wasn't all too cool,
I wanted some attention, so I tried to play the fool.
Wandering through them hallways, I was always in a trance,
With lips that didn't smile, and feet that couldn't dance.
It's hard to find that someone, when you're scared to take a chance,
Lots of time to study, when you haven't got romance.

Inside then, I was whiter than white.
Outside then, I was too damn yellow.
Inside then, I was too uptight. Outside then, I was too damn mellow.
I met this lovely lady once, she made me feel so great,
I fantasized nightly, that she'd be my future mate.
I gathered up my courage, and set up a casual date.
I wondered if she didn't show, or was she really late?
I called her on the telephone, so she could make amends,
They told me that she left the house, at way back when,
She said although she liked me, and considered me a friend,
She did not hear them weddin' bells, with certain men.

We carry on the struggle for survival in this land,
we're the dawning of the New Age Asianadian
Find yourself, in your History! Find yourself, in your Community!
Find yourself, in your Identity! Find yourself, becoming Free!
Now, I'm the ethnic all Canadian, born again Asian,
the ultimate product, of assimilation!
An integral part, of the fabric of this nation,
I'm right on top, of every situation!
I've paid all my dues, and I understand, I know who I am,
and I do what I can!
Between the East and the West, I always take my stand,
I'm the New Age Asianadian!
Between the East and the West, I always take my stand,

I'm the New Age Asianadian!

We carry on the struggle for survival in this land,
we're the dawning of the New Age Asianadian
Find yourself, in your History! Find yourself, in your Community!
Find yourself, in your Identity! Find yourself, becoming Free!
I'm the Chinatown rapper, I'm the Buddha MC,
I'm the man with the clapper from sea to sea.
I'm the J-town cruiser, I'm the Number One Son,
I'm the rootin' tootin' bruiser, I'm the son of a Gunn.
I've paid all my dues, and I understand,
I know who I am, and I do what I can!
Between the East and the West, I always take my stand,
I'm the New Age Asianadian!
Between the East and the West, I always take my stand,
I'm the New Age Asianadian!

The Asianadian was a 1980s community arts magazine. Clapper is a Chinese percussion instrument. J-town is Japantown.

Sean Gunn, a former director of the Chinese Benevolent Association, is a founding member of the Asian Canadian Writers' Workshop. As well, he composes and performs music which has been soundtracked for videos and films.

HOLLY BOYD

The Downtown Eastside

The Downtown Eastside means lots of stuff to me.
There are protest for missing women,
Homeless people on the DTES will still be here through thick and thin,
and help everyone who need help.
I have lost a lot of friends from drugs and suicide
They thought there was no help for them or they gave up.
I saw someone commit suicide and that made me sad
And I thought What made him do such a thing?
But I knew the answer to that already,
And even though I have been here for 2 years
It is time for me to go.

DAN THOMPSON

Hastings Street

Hastings Street, can't be beat
How I love my Hastings Street
Lordy knows I love her so
She can't be beat, our Hastings Street

Up and down and all around
Whatever you want can be found
How I love her so, never let her go
She can't be beat, our Hastings Street
Our home sweet home Hastings Street

Welfare lines, cops with blinds
People going right out of their minds
They're the ones that are free
They're you and me
We can't be beat on Hastings Street

High heel shoes, swollen hand blues
Everybody's got nothing to lose
We call our home the best ever known
Our friends we meet on Hastings Street
Home sweet home Hastings Street

Flowers Café, Looney Tunes
Folks around here don't need full moon
We got a Mardi-Gras Day – the smoke so sweet
No need to cry for Hastings Street

So here we stand hand 'n hand
On this piece of unceded land
And every day we try to find our way
Down a lovely beat called Hastings Street

The Man That Had No Name

Ain't got a penny to my name
And I brought myself to shame
But I got no one to blame
Because I played the game
Of a man that had no name

Had it pretty good once upon ago
I wheeled and dealed, I ran the show
But in order to make my mark
Had to stand off in the dark
Where no seeds of hope could grow

I rode around in big black cars
I talked to kings, I slept with stars
But when I went off to my home
I went there all alone
Might as well lived on Mars

I learned to lie, I learned to deceive
I even learned to disbelieve
And then I built a hill of gold
But now I know what got sold
Just went up the devil's sleeve

And I got mean and I got rude
I learned to steal a baby's food
But then they left me in the ditch
Said ain't life a bitch
And see ya later dude!

So if you see them coming for you
They want to teach ya how to turn the screw
You just remember this refrain
If you want to avoid the pain
Of a man that has no name

Cause I ain't got a penny to my name
And I brought myself to shame
And I got no one to blame

Cause I played the game
Of a man that had no name
So if you wanna avoid the pain
Don't play the game of a man that had no name

Mardi Gras Day

We were fifteen mile from home
Twenty-thousand feats from Rome
When the essence and the meaning
Of the truth got in the way
- wasn't much to say
Just the price you pay,
For going all the way

She was standing by the door
About four feet off the floor
And every little question had the
Sweet smell of dismay,
A million times a day

And we sang Oh, this is so divine
Kept thinking here,
maybe one more time
Kept thinking Oh,
we're going all the way
On a Mardi Gras Day

Step into my world one more time
Do you wanna do it?
Put your self through it?
Dance along a parallel line,
take a short vacation
From this mental masturbation,
you never know
How high you may climb,
face the cruel resistance
Put your parts upon the distance
It's all licorice, lemon, lavender, lime
What? Ya never been deflowered -

Bullshit

Where do we stand
that we gut the sacred cow
And the entrails of resistance
we left out on display
Wasn't much to say
Just the price you pay
for going all the way

Well it's one more time around,
In for a penny
Out of a pound,
and everything that's missing
Is what we hid away,
get on your knees and pray
We're going all the way

And when they rolled her
down the stairs
Unalive and unaware,
did anyone remember
If there was anything left to say
The day she went away

And we sang Oh, this is so divine
Kept thinking here one more time
Kept thinking we're going all the way
On a Mardi Gras Day

(p.s. The sad thing about it is that the only people who can tell you what hardcore addiction is really all about are all dead).

DORA SANDERS

After the Civic Strike

You will discover the Carnegie Centre,
where the muffins hang on the potted plants like leaves
where the coffee pours out of taps, free, so bring a cup.
Where bread is made in breadmakers on each table
and jam is available in little containers, but bring a knife
Where regulars play card games, chess and checkers
and smile all day, which is sweet to see.
Where visitors are many and the food floor is busy all day
and every day, selling French, Asian and European meals.
Where the Learning Centre has wall to wall eager students
and the computers have the latest programs,
as do the computers in the computer room.
Carnegie means peace and harmony as all about is stormy.
A garden in the midst of turmoil.

Dora Saunders has retired from the Carnegie after more than 15 years of volunteering in the computer lab, writing for the Newsletter, and serving on the Board. She says her days there have been an exciting, interesting and worthwhile adventure.

MELISSA EROR

Creation

I love beauty and fine craftsmanship.
I love joy and all the complex patterns of life's interaction.

I love cultures – they are the flowers of our kind
Each one flowering – and each one seeding its own time.

I love nature in all of her forms and in all of her moods.
And I love creation and the act of creation.

I love the finely tuned works of master craftsmen wherever they may be.

I don't live in the Downtown Eastside anymore. But this is not by choice. I love the Downtown Eastside. It's where I want to be and where I am almost every day.

Now I've been known to mention on occasion my passion for experiencing altered states of consciousness – particularly drug induced ones. And I've certainly been known on occasion to indulge. But that's not the reason I love the Downtown Eastside. Far from it. Drugs are generally cheaper, of better quality and just as handy about everywhere else in the lower Mainland.

And yeah, it's dirty, noisy, crowded and often vulgar and sometimes violent – just like in the movies – only better. I love the Downtown Eastside – it's a world of creativity, industry and passion where even crack pipes become a work of art – of individual expression. Where everything and nothing is taken seriously. Where everyone is welcome and everyone is fair game and where we help each other, each in our own way – and just as much as we are able, despite our often public sometimes media worthy arguments.

I love the Downtown Eastside – my friends, my culture and my family are all here. So is my heart. It's the one place where I am always welcome – well, at least known by name.

And I know each brick, each crack, and every plant that thrives in the crumbling mortar along the alley walls and in the sidewalks. These are my prized possessions. This is my home. And you are all welcome here.

MONTANA HUNTER

Take a Better Look

I'm Montana. I'm eleven years old.
People call me Blu
I love the Downtown Eastside
It's got a lot of great things.

One of the things I don't like
Around the Downtown Eastside
Is all the swearing you hear.

It's okay if you let it out once in a while
When you stub your toe
Or hit an emotional black hole
But when you get into a habit
That's when it starts bothering me.

I really don't like the drug scene
The ragged clothing
And the look of deep darkness
On some people's faces
Doesn't make it any easier

But the Downtown Eastside
Has a lot of great things, too.

For instance,

The Carnegie Centre helps a lot of people.
I remember chess
With many different kinds of people
At the Carnegie
People off the streets
And old Chinese Men

Lots of people are honest, really nice
And it's easy to make friends

All the flowering parks
Give you grassy areas
Where kids can play
And dogs can run

Everything you need is in walking distance
From schools and libraries to corner stores
There's even a theatre

You can learn everything
On the Downtown Eastside
From chess and fencing
To dance and piano

Montana Hunter was born and raised in the Downtown Eastside. A homelearner who has just entered UBC, Montana was eleven when he wrote and performed this poem for Savage God's I Love the Downtown Eastside (2002).

RUDOLF PENNER

Written on the Wind

drifting down sidewalks
in grey early mornings
seeing some Shakespeare in mini-store windows
waiting for fate to take over
make issues that really need dealing with
like having a hat made in Montreal
or discovering a Lost Golden Oldie at Charlie's
or hearing a Beatles song for the first time on an unheard album
draggin' my feet looking for no ordinary coffee
paying a little less to get Fair Trade Organic
walking with a stick that I'm turning into a diadem
yesterday's whisky
time to push a Security Guard's buttons

The New Downtown Eastside

Walking up Main Street.
3 ambulances and a bus.
There's an old theatre that looks brand new
Made into a Marketing Office
That shows old Led Zeppelin flicks at night
I wonder if the cops put a stop to that.
There's a whole shipment of birds
Flying, crapping on mailboxes
New businesses: I love to watch them
Give it their best shot.
Too bad many of them close within the year.
One was run by an immigrant.
He said the cops were always there
trying to accuse him of having a front for drugs.
He made the mistake of selling snacks to drug dealers
– homemade Spanish tamales and chocolate bars.
Walking down Hastings I see what looks like a giant garage sale.
My friend goes there to buy nailpolish for 25 cents off old ladies
– makes a special trip
Tells me about it – highly illegal
United We Can sets the scene for this inconvenience,
this public disorder that nobody minds but the cops.
Walking up Pender, count it or not,
It's part of the Downtown Eastside
with its own cops – Chinese ones, so we hear via rumour,
nothing bad happens in Chinatown, so they tell,
that this ethnic-specific force is not “on it”!
Walking back down Main Street we see the Carnegie Centre
with its green roof, they can't keep gold, the way it's supposed to be
with its marshall core of security cops,
yet another private surveillance team.
Everybody's watching.
Watching if your eyes're too bright...
...lookin' to see if you're feeling a bit tight...
Just left another theatre that was supposed to be opened long ago,
restored with \$3 million.
I'd rather see a garden filling Hastings Street East
with detoxing gardeners & children smiling together
and parents frying hamburgers there, on open barbecues

How Poor is Poor

How poor is poor
If I choose to do with money
What others wouldn't dream of
Am I now suddenly rich, to be envied, to be looked at
With a sidewise glance?
How poor is poor
If you're entrusted with a heavier load
Than others would dream of
Are you now suddenly stronger,
to be used and chewed upon in private?
If Henry spends his cash on smokes
And Irene needs lots of dope
Can there be a decent justification
If I spent my wad
On developing my concentration
Taking yoga or mosaic construction
Am I richer?
If I choose to teach for free
And end up paying higher prices for my dinner just to do so;
Is the drinker poorer than the professor?
Some poor patrons spend their dollars on food
And still end up in the gutter
Some on computers wireless connectors newspapers and bicycles
Is poor is as poor does?
Is a computer or television owner now rich, because he's not eating?
Learning, watching, reaching?
Are you poorer to steal your toilet paper and chocolate bars
because you spent your coins on women and wine?
Are you poorer still
to visit the famed?
How private are your parts?
If suddenly a stranger from New York
buys you a ticket to the Rock Show
but springs on you the tune:
Now you must buy the beer
At premium prices 2,3,4,5,7 later
They used to say, there's no free lunch
But I, for one, have had a bunch

KELLY STEWART

Carnegie is where somebody always cares
Where your troubles are easy to share
Nonchalant we seem to be
But when it counts, there are we
Disappear for a day or two
Someone will send out a search party for you
Watching over us, the silent few
The folks of Carnegie, thank God for you.

Broken hearts, broken smiles
Life seems somehow not worthwhile
Then out of the gloom, appears a beacon of hope
The Carnegie, where a hot coffee and a warm greeting
from the people inside help you forget for a moment
the reality of your nights
A place of safety if only for an hour
A place where people talk in soft voices,
not the usual shouts and screams and people so mean
you hear outside
Somedays Carnegie can feel just like a warm hug.

How I arrived at Carnegie

Riding by on the bus one day I wondered “What goes on in that beautiful old building”? It looked pretty scary outside and I thought “is this what’s happening inside too?” Take a chance, check it out!! Nah, looks too dangerous to me, think I’ll pass this time, maybe next time.

Riding by on the bus, “where did all those scary people go?” There is no one outside. Quick jump off the bus, let’s see what’s inside.

Inside safe and sound, look around, welcome smiles

Great food, only \$1.75

4 floors of stuff going on

All kinds of people mostly doing their own thing.

Now after two years or more of coming to Carnegie every week, sometimes to volunteer, other times to relax and meet up with friends, I realize now what looked so scary before now just seems sad, and my heart’s fears have been replaced with compassion and a sense of belonging.

Kelly Stewart is a wise old woman completing her Master’s Degree at The School of Hard Knocks. An accidental poet and lover of all things purple, especially her scooter! Carnegie has included her picture on their family Christmas tree and named her outstanding volunteer of the month for August 2008.

ROLF AUER

DTES Love

The heart of the Downtown Eastside has to be the Carnegie Centre. It has so much going on and it is a community centre for everybody in the Downtown Eastside.

The first Saturday of each month features Poetry Night, hosted by Diane Wood. Successive Saturday nights are documentary nights, put on by a very active board member at the Carnegie.

Let's not forget the Carnegie Library, on the first floor. It has a reading room, where patrons can while away the hours reading their favourite books, magazines, or newspapers. It is a bona fide Vancouver Public Library branch, so you can reserve books throughout the system there. There is the Association Office on the second floor, which is a hub of activity for the Carnegie Community Action Project, and also for volunteer editor Paul Taylor, who puts out The Carnegie Newsletter every two weeks (for the past 21 years!). There is the popular cafeteria where satisfying meals can be had for rock bottom prices. Tuesday night is vegan night, and on other nights, one of the two dinners offered is usually vegetarian.

Also, there's the weight room, where one can get a bit of exercise in. There's also the computer room, where you can book time on one of the machines, or just quickly check your e-mail.

What makes it go is the great work by the many volunteers. What makes life really interesting at the Carnegie is the fantastic mix of all different types of people – young, old, multicultural – you name it and the Carnegie has it! Security personnel at the Centre make interacting with others always a peaceful, pleasant experience. Whatever your background, whatever your experiences, the Carnegie Centre is truly where you'll find the heart of the Downtown Eastside.

Rolf Auer lives in social housing and knows the advantages of that, and lives on a disability pension and knows the disadvantages of that. He does a lot of volunteer work: a Carnegie board member, a member of the Carnegie Community Action Project, the Raise the Rates Coalition, and the Low-Income Land Use and Housing Coalition. He writes regularly for the Carnegie Newsletter, he also writes a lot of letters to the editors of the printed newsmedia about anti-poverty issues.

AYISHA FARUK

Down Town Eastside

Corner of Main and Hastings
Four blocks of loving kindness
Come with a clean heart
We will welcome you to our hood
I am called by many names
The heart of the city
The soul of Vancouver
Ah the melodrama!
Media Hawks scramble for my story
With their spiteful remedies

Mr. And Mrs. Self Important Techno Nerds
Thy poli-tricks cause me too much pain
Megalomaniacs seek to destroy my hood
With their towers of Babylon Babel
Drive past me daily in their coffin on wheels
The rich getting richer
The poor is watching
Spiv Merchant
Oh yes, glad to see you to get my fix
Drunkenness and drug addictions
To remember misery no more
Thou holiness
Preach while my bowel grumbles
Hell is never full yet
I claim heaven where I stand and sleep
Amidst bed bugs, cockroaches, and rats
My heavenly music comes from seagull, crow and pigeons
Oh kanada, thou naked and no home
British Columbia, the best place on earth?!
What is thy crime, Turtle Island?
On the streets of the Down Town Eastside.



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Graham Cunningham

This community-generated work was digitized and deposited to cIRcle, UBC's open access digital repository, as part of the *Digitizing Community Memories* project of the *Making Research Accessible in the Downtown Eastside initiative (MRAi)*. In collaboration with the UBC Learning Exchange and UBC Library, the project provided training and support for community members in the Downtown Eastside to digitize and make openly available community-generated materials. This project aimed to increase access to historic Carnegie Centre publications and preserve these unique materials for years to come.

For more information on this project and the UBC Learning Exchange, please visit learningexchange.ubc.ca.

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