

Spring 2022



# MCLL *News*



**McGill**

School of  
Continuing Studies

# *Improving access with better signs, less clutter*

*By Susan Purcell*

**A**s preparations near completion for a return to our familiar spaces at 680 Sherbrooke, a task force is busy making it easier for us to move around, and see and hear adequately in classes.

“Our members have a whole spectrum of age-related physical characteristics, including hearing or visual problems, and changed perceptual abilities”, says accessibility task force member Tim Skene.

Early last year a team of McGill Master’s students in occupational therapy offered to assess our physical setup, to determine how well it serves our membership. Their report received last fall made several useful recommendations. MCLL then set up a task force to further study these ideas and implement them. Members besides Tim are Michael Moore, Barbara MacLeod-Rey and Nancy Rosenfeld; all have professional expertise in relevant areas.

Clear new signs on the first and second floors were expected to be among the first changes, but have been postponed pending approval by McGill. Signs must be consistent and meet McGill standards. We hope new signs will be up by fall.

Outdoors, at the main Sherbrooke Street entrance, we have asked for a clearer sign pointing out the automatic door for wheelchair users.

Classroom capacity has already been reduced due to pandemic restrictions, but the task force asks that reduced capacity be permanent. In addition, MCLL is removing unneeded chairs, including those stacked in corners. Adjustments to the configuration of tables will further improve circulation for wheelchairs and people. Eventually improvements will be made to kitchen and lounge configurations.

Several more elaborate changes are planned, as our budget allows. Among them are upholstered chairs on safety casters, new hearing equipment, and task lights to help members see better when making presentations. MCLL has asked McGill to improve escalator maintenance, and install automatic sliding doors on Sherbrooke Street to replace both the revolving door at the east entrance, and the heavy doors at both entrances. 🍁





## *The grande dame of MCLL is in her 100<sup>th</sup> year!*

Our beloved Miriam Tees celebrated her 99<sup>th</sup> birthday in February at a party arranged by neighbours at her Westmount apartment. Since 1996, Miriam has shared her extensive knowledge of music by moderating countless MCLL study groups, and has represented us at many conferences and special meetings. Always smiling and sharp as a tack, she still drives her car around town, swims every morning (when the building's pool is operational), takes courses, chats over Zoom and enjoys a glass of wine with friends. Cheers, Miriam, and may you have many more! 🍁

## Council adds new faces, a new committee

The following members were elected to the MCLL Council for the 2022-23 year, starting June 15:

Gordon Campey



President: Robert Winters

Vice-President: Rick Jones

Past President: Jeff Sidel

Treasurer: Sid Rosen

Secretary: Lorne Huston

Communications: Nadine Ozkan\*\*

Community Outreach\*: Lorne Huston

Curriculum: Sheila Mason

Development: Paul Kuai-Yu Leong

IT: Tim Skene

Planning: Honora Shaughnessy\*\*,  
Leslie Paris

Special Events: Linda Sidel

Volunteer Coordinator: Susan Biggs

Program Administrator: Ana Milic

Administrative Coordinator:  
Sally Cooper

\*new committee

\*\*new member

## No more “us” and “them”: speaker

By Sandra Frisby

The guest speaker at this year’s AGM was David Acco, a Cree-Métis from Saskatchewan and long-time Montreal resident. His management company, Acosys Consulting, is an indigenous-led firm combining technology with indigenous knowledge to promote a better world.

Mr. Acco’s tone was lighthearted but his message deeply serious. He traced the history of his people leading to reconciliation. Although the first Europeans made treaties with the Indigenous peoples, they still considered North America an “empty land,” thus giving themselves the right to occupy it. Mr. Acco argued that the long-term aim of the Indian Act was the gradual elimination of “Indians” through absorption. For example, mandatory residential schools were established in 1883 to eliminate Indian languages, culture and even birthdates. He also put forth that Canada essentially “exported” the Indian Act, which helped “inspire” apartheid in South Africa and the policies and practices of the Nazis against the Jews during the Second World War.

The speaker highlighted a shocking statistic: The chances of dying in the Second World War were one in 26: the chances of dying in a residential school were one in 25.

The situation is improving, he acknowledged, as witnessed by the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2008, and the “red journey” of many indigenous people to trace their roots and demand acknowledgement of systemic racism, a shocking case in point being the death of Joyce Echaquan here in 2020.

“What can we do?” he challenged us. We can recognize and validate indigenous world views, celebrate indigenous holidays, look for ways of expanding our knowledge, throw out the “us” and “them” mindset and denounce racism in all its forms. He left us with the caution that “words matter.” 🇨🇦



# President salutes volunteers

Speaking to his audience at the AGM on March 24, Outgoing Council President Jeff Sidel acknowledged the contribution made to the success of MCLL throughout the pandemic by specific volunteers and staff. He spoke about the hybrid learning model that will be launched as of the Spring 2022 semester, and about the importance of community outreach for the purpose of diversity and inclusion. To further this aim, a permanent committee on council will be established with Lorne Huston as its first chair.

Jeff shared the success of the recent MCLL-McGill24 Crowdfunding Campaign, which garnered over \$14,000, most of this donated on the first day. The monies will be used to invest in projects which address the needs of our members, including equipping classrooms for hybrid learning and upgrading member accessibility.

Finally, he saluted Sally Cooper and helpers for planning virtual social events such as holiday and Valentine's get-togethers, intended in part to reach out to people isolated by the pandemic. These events highlight the enormous talent pool drawn from our members, who provide their own entertainment.

He concluded with a birthday tribute from the Beatles in honour of our Program Administrator Ana Milic. 🍷

S. F.

Nadine Ozkan



## *Birthday cake steals the scene at moderators' lunch*

Sixty MCLL moderators, hosts and volunteers were celebrated with an elegant lunch at the Omni Hotel on April 6, 2022. It was our first in-person gathering in over two years. A highlight was this beautiful cake Ana Milic (left) arranged to mark the recent birthday of our organizer extraordinaire, Sally Cooper (right). 🍷

# War fears touch our community

By Susan Purcell

The war in Ukraine touches two of our MCLL moderators personally. François Labonté and Paul Doucet worked together as consultants in Ukraine from 2000 to 2009 with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

Their assignments covered the whole country from Kyiv to Lviv to Odessa. Since war broke out, they have had news of two of their Ukrainian friends.

Andriy Kononenko (photo) was their interpreter/translator in Kyiv. He used his skills to open a successful international language school, teaching Russian and Ukrainian to diplomats and members of the American military. He and his wife lived comfortably and were able to send their three children, aged 11 to 16, to private school and enjoy travel.

By mid-February war appeared imminent. As troops massed on the border, he evacuated his family to his wife's mother's home in western Ukraine. That ended after shelling forced them to spend two nights in a bomb shelter. They made a hasty departure to safety in Torm, Poland. The children's school lets them study in their own language and learn Polish. They were working on obtaining Canadian passports.

Courtesy A. Kononenko



*Andriy Kononenko*

Meanwhile Andriy became a soldier at the age of 51. From the field in winter, he wrote: "None of us particularly wants to be here, sleeping in the woods, frozen to the bone, but..we have no choice..." He joined because "I fear being thought a coward more than I fear death".

Another friend, Petro Radchuk, had been EBRD representative in Kyiv and later became a successful financier in Lviv. In February he evacuated his family to Prague, and headed for Kyiv to join the resistance. François and Paul report that "(We) last spoke to him on Facetime with bombs exploding in the background." 🇺🇦





## *Anxious time for MCLLers from Ukraine*

**T**wo other MCLLers are touched by this war. Svetlana Stroskaya, 82, is a Russian Ukrainian born in Kyiv who came to Canada 30 years ago. “I know all the places in Ukraine which are bomb destroyed. I feel so helpless”, she said, adding it’s a stressful time in Montreal, with its Russian community sharply divided on the conflict.

*S. P.*

Roman Korol, also 82, arrived here as a child but Ukrainian remains his first language. Before the invasion he had about 40 close relatives living in Kyiv, Melitopol, Vilshanytsia, Lviv, Stryi, Drohobych and Ivano-Frankivsk. With three of his younger relatives in the Ukrainian Army, Roman waits anxiously for news. 🇺🇦



### **Editor’s note**

Welcome to our redesigned newsletter, MCLL News! As your new editor, I hope you’ll enjoy reading about MCLL and the lives of our members. Many thanks to everyone who contributed material, and to all who checked for accuracy. Comments or suggestions? I’m at [suepurcell@videotron.ca](mailto:suepurcell@videotron.ca). 🇺🇦

*S. P.*

# Muffling masks, solitary song

By Susan Purcell

The past two-plus years of lockdown have been challenging for choirs. Nadine Ozkan sings in both L'ensemble vocale du chœur de Lafontaine (popular music) and Polumia (classical) in NDG. Neither choir held concerts but both rehearsed regularly, wearing masks and standing wide apart.

“With masks or social distance, I don’t hear the others so much”. she says. “I’m an alto, and have usually been surrounded by other altos. We support each other”. But surprisingly, “It’s actually improved my singing. I need to learn my part better, and be more sure of myself.” On the down side, “The mask muffles. I miss that choral sound”, she says.

For Rick Jones and Andrew Macdougall, singing in the Montreal Welsh Male Choir has meant no in-person rehearsals and no performances during Covid. Instead they recorded themselves singing at home while listening to the music with headphones, and sent the results to their conductor, who provided feedback.

This process would continue over several weeks. Then the conductor began the onerous task of editing dozens of individual videos into one unified piece, to be performed on multiple tiny Zoom screens.

“We went back and forth, back and forth”, jokes Andrew, “but I swear I never got better!” Rick found the home experience “interesting but solitary. It took away one of my joys — singing in harmony with others.”

Montreal Welsh Male Choir



Rick Jones (left, front) and Andrew Macdougall (right, front) in freer days with the Montreal Welsh Male Choir.

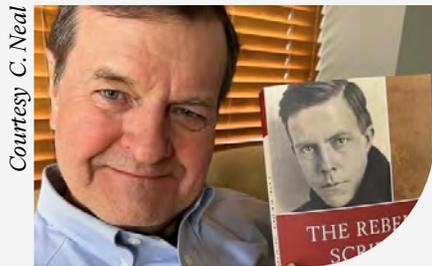
In recent years Rick has been in an impressive five choirs. Anima Musica (AM) and the St. Lawrence Choir (SLC) returned to in-person rehearsals last fall. “Both required a vaccine passport, a mask while singing, and social distancing”, explains Rick. “AM asked choristers to fill out an electronic form every week that we were symptom-free.” Before a rare December concert, AM singers gladly agreed to take rapid antigen tests.

Spring brought some relief. For a big SLC concert at the Maison Symphonique in April, Rick and his colleagues were delighted to sing without any masks at all. 🍀



## New Moderators

# *A communicator and a physician* By Susan Purcell



Courtesy C. Neal

Christopher Neal, currently co-moderating a study group with Paul Doucet on *Latin America: Past, Present and Future*, got to know Latin America from the ground up, during three years as a freelance reporter in the area.

After a stint reporting for The Montreal Gazette he headed south, returning fluent in Spanish as well as English and French. In the late 80s he changed gears to work for development organizations CUSO and CIDA before joining the World Bank in Washington, managing communications for its Latin America department. He and his wife, born in Nicaragua, raised their children in the U.S. before retiring to Montreal, where he is active in English-language organizations.

Chris is currently promoting his “labour of love”, a book he worked on for 20 years called *The Rebel Scribe – Carleton Beals and the Progressive Challenge to US Policy in Latin America*. (For info contact [clineal@gmail.com](mailto:clineal@gmail.com))

The idea of an inter-generational study group combining the experience of Latin American students at McGill with that of MCLL members, appealed to Chris. Starting April 26 for six weeks, young participants make presentations and MCLL members follow with questions and comments. In the sixth and final week Chris will lead a session on job opportunities in the development field.

“It’s remarkable how admired Canada is in Latin America. Some of their best and brightest future leaders come to McGill”, Chris says. Fostering dialogue through a study group is a great way for Canadians to share our valuable “soft power” with them. 🍀



Courtesy R. Vexler

Ron Vexler brings a seasoned medical perspective to a study group he is co-moderating on *The Black Death: Much worse than Covid*. A graduate of McGill School of Medicine, Ron has spent his 45-year career as a physician and cardiologist in his native Ottawa, working mainly at the Heart Institute and Queensway-Carleton Hospital. He describes himself now as mostly retired, but still seeing patients via Zoom. He’s an active member of the Ontario Telehealth Network, which has introduced interactive medical practice via the Internet to rural communities.

The core of the Black Death study group is a series of filmed lectures on the cataclysmic mid-14<sup>th</sup> century pandemic that killed up to half of Europe’s population. But Ron most enjoys the discussion that follows, when participants discuss how people reacted then, compared to now. “So many aspects of behaviour then, are similar to what we’re seeing now – denial, invoking extraterrestrials, even blaming a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter for miasma, or bad air. The only thing we haven’t repeated during Covid is practicing self-flagellation”, he quips. “In 1348 they felt God inflicted the Black Death as a punishment, so they beat themselves to atone for their sins.”

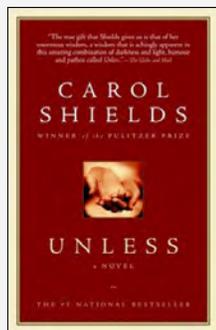
In his own words, Dr. Vexler’s other interests include “contemporary politics, medieval history, sociology – and bringing back the Expos!” 🍀



## Books

# Misfits and money matters

### Fiction



## *Unless,* by Carol Shields 2002

The epigraph from George Eliot at the start of *Unless* refers to “all ordinary human life”, and that is what Reta Winters’ life has been — comfortable, happy, even fulfilled. She has already had one novel published, is writing a second, and is planning a sequel. But this existence is ripped apart when her eldest Norah, 19, abruptly leaves home, drops out of university and daily occupies a busy Toronto street corner with the word “GOODNESS” written on a piece of cardboard over her chest.

No wonder the book begins with Reta saying “It happens that I am going through a period of great unhappiness and loss just now”. And she takes us along with her on the road to understanding and regaining her daughter.

What is Norah trying to say as she sits there in all weathers, collecting coins but giving them all away in the evening? We the readers share her mother’s quest to find a reason. Reta finds comfort in her writing, her friends, and the family routine. She shares the critical letters she writes to other authors, accusing them of ignoring the fact that women lead interesting lives and play an essential role in our society. Has Norah already sensed that this is so?

This is a gripping read and is all the more moving as this turned out to be Shields’ last work. She died the year after it was published. 🍁

*By Lesley Régnier*



## *And the birds rained down* (*Il pleuvait des oiseaux*), by Jocelyne Saucier, translated by Rhonda Mullins 2012

This small book by New Brunswick writer Jocelyne Saucier has been described as a haunting meditation on ageing and self-determination. Three octogenarians strike out into the northern Ontario woods, with a plan to live out their remaining years without outside interference. Each has his own cabin with a wood stove, an outhouse and a dog. For eight months they are barricaded by snow; only smoke rising from neighbouring chimneys tells them all is well with the others.

After some years and the death of one of the three, their quiet life is suddenly up-ended by the arrival of an elderly woman unjustly institutionalized all her life. An outsider like the men, she finds a home in their community.

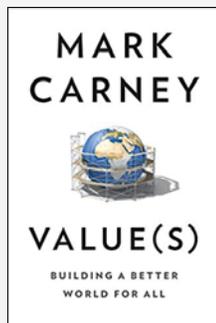
Another thread of the story involves a young female photographer searching for survivors of two summers of deadly forest fires early in the last century. The reader learns of the Great Fires, an actual historic tragedy that swept through towns and villages in the area, killing over 200 and wiping out entire families.

I highly recommend this charming and heart-warming story, which was made into a movie in 2019 (poster seen here), featuring local talent and set in Quebec. 🍁

*By Judy Clark*



Non-fiction



*Value(s): Building a better world for all,*  
by Mark Carney  
2021

This book is intimidating. My 600-page hardcopy weighs 850 grams and is 4 ½ centimetres thick. If you're not an economist, you may well tense up at the thought of having to plow through this giant.

It is hard to discount the possibility that the path that we have chosen for “development” may be based on some weak premises. The parenthetical plural in the book's title opens the door to a re-evaluation of those premises and whether they are serving humankind and the planet.

Using his credentials as perhaps the world's most famous banker, the Canadian and former Bank of England governor urges us to join the call for change from all sectors of society before it is too late, and shows how change can be achieved.

The book cover depicts a globe surrounded by scaffolding — the image of a world in need of repair of its financial plumbing, of reaffirmation of the role of the state in protecting citizens and of ensuring the environment is appropriately valued in the functioning of the modern state.

This is not a manifesto for deep systemic change or the abolition of capitalism. Carney is an optimist who believes in innovation, technology, green growth to solve the climate crisis, and the ability of our institutions to respond to the challenges that face us— as long as we are ready to recognize, and act on, the difference between value, as in the amount we are willing to pay for something, and values, the things that really matter when facing a crisis. 🍁

*By Paul MacLean*

*Paul is co-author with John-David Phyper of Good to Green: Managing Business Risks and Opportunities in the Age of Environmental Awareness (John Wiley and Sons, 2009)*



# Letter from Tel Aviv

By Jackie Yarosky

Courtesy J. Yarosky



Jackie enjoying the sunshine on the Mediterranean coast.

Greetings from Tel Aviv! In 2003 I returned to my hometown, Montreal, after living here in Israel for almost twenty years. A year or two later, MILR became an integral part of life except during the winters which were spent here. Gradually, after much deliberation, I returned to Israel in October 2020, as Covid raged. My immediate family is split between the two cities. Half my friends live here and half in Montreal. Such is my bi-national and bi-cultural life.

Tops on the positive side of life here are the weather, the health care system and the informality of daily life. Tel Aviv is “the city that never stops”. For most of the year, the cafés, restaurants, bars, beaches and boardwalks are noisy and crowded well into the wee hours, when I’m sound asleep! Social plans are often made at the last minute, which I love.

This part of the world is an archeological and historical paradise. Whenever possible I join local walking or bus tours to explore and learn.

A very huge negative from my perspective is the political situation. It’s not understood that all inhabitants of this country and region must learn to live together in peace and dignity. Unfortunately the human species doesn’t seem to learn from history.

Thanks to Zoom, I still attend study groups at MCLL. How wonderful to see friends and meet new ones while living so far away! I also attend a few local courses online as well as in person, and although my Hebrew language skills are adequate, there are gaps in my understanding. I’m so glad MCLL offers study groups online.

Please let me know if you are planning to visit:

[jyarosky@gmail.com](mailto:jyarosky@gmail.com)

Best regards to all! 🍁

## MCLL

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