

The Flood Stories Project



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THE FLOOD STORIES TEAM

Michelle Superle is Founder and Creative Director of the 20 Harvest Challenge, a sustainability education program that connects stories with human rights to counter climate anxiety by inspiring collaborative action. Flood Stories is part of the 20 Harvest Challenge.

As a Yarrow resident who was evacuated during the flood, and a lifelong lover of stories (and people!), Superle was inspired to start the Flood Stories project by her volunteer work for the Yarrow Food Hub, where she listened to farmers affected by the flood. After interviewing more than a dozen for her article “After the Floods” in *edible Vancouver and Wine Country* magazine, she knew there was more to the story than a 1250-word article could capture.

Now—one year, tens of thousands of words, and many dozens of participants later—Superle understands that there’s a flood of stories still waiting to be told. The Flood Stories project will continue moving forward in collaboration with the Climate Disaster Project; stay tuned for details as they emerge.

Superle’s own experience of the flood began the evening of Sunday, November 14th, 2021, when her husband suggested bringing their precious memorabilia up from the crawl space. They did. Fortunately, their home was one of the lucky ones where not so much as a gum wrapper became damp. As soon as she returned home from evacuation, she began volunteering at the Yarrow Food Hub.

Her experience of life since November 2021, up to and including the time of this writing, can be described with phrases such as, “go, go, go”; “keep going”; “still? really?”, “again?”, “wow...just...wow”, and most of all, “thank you so much”.

In many ways, for many of us, the flood is still happening just under the surface. You might not be able to see it, but it’s still swirling. And so, in the words of many Flood Stories participants and contributors, “we just keep going”.

Here’s to their relentless good work and generous community of spirit.

This book—and the entire Flood Stories project—is dedicated to everyone who shared their story with us. We are so honoured to be on this journey with you.

Thank you for trusting us with your stories.

The Flood Stories Project

Sydney Marchand is Project Manager and Event Coordinator for the 20 Harvest Challenge, which is home to three community research projects: Flood Stories, Dig for Your Rights! and Dress for Your Rights!

Sydney connected with Michelle through the course English 215, Creative Nonfiction, in the Fall 2021 semester at the University of the Fraser Valley. In December 2021 they began collaborating on the Flood Stories project with the common goal of changing the world through words.

Sydney's passions for food security, climate activism, and sustainable living are at the heart of her research and influences much of her written work. Be it through the lens of journalism or creative writing, Sydney is passionate about the value and power that comes from expressing oneself through words and creative formats.

She is immensely grateful to be involved in such ground-breaking community research and hopes that viewers are encouraged by the resilience and hope exemplified by the community. The project is a testament in proving that we are stronger, infinitely braver, and more capable than we give ourselves credit.

The Flood Stories Project

Aidan van Delft is a fourth-year student in the Bachelor of Fine Arts program at UFV. He's a painter, a husband, and a high school education assistant. Aidan joined the Flood Stories project after Michelle approached him requesting that he judge the creative arts contest. From there he went on to become more involved as the team's archivist, curator, and self-proclaimed aesthetic director.

When the flood hit in 2021, Aidan found himself stranded in Chilliwack, unable to return home to Langley for the next three days. Once home, a much bigger problem revealed itself: almost every major highway leading out of the Fraser Valley had been washed out or covered by landslides. At the time, Aidan's father was rapidly falling ill to the cancer that had spread throughout his body, and Aidan was left with no way to reach him. The flood kept Aidan and five of his siblings from visiting their father for almost a month before Highway 99 was finally clear and open to essential travel only. Aidan was then able to make it up to Smithers, B.C., one week before his wedding, to visit his father one last time before he passed away on January 7, 2022.

With this experience, Aidan was eager to join the Flood Stories project to help create a platform for others to share and have their stories heard.

The Flood Stories Project



Michelle Superle



Sydney Marchand



Aidan van Delft

CHILDREN'S STORIES

Greendale Elementary Community School

Project Transcripts:

Mr. Hoepfner's Class Video

Student 1: My name is Mackannah and this is my story of the floods. So first, we were at my friend's house and there was this house during the flood that they were building. This house just comes tumbling down into the house and it was really scary. But luckily nobody got hurt and the house was really old.

And then they had to rebuild it. And that is what happened.

Student 2: My name is Madison and this is my story about the floods. My cousin's house flooded and so she had to stay at our house for one week and I got to play with her.

Student 3: My name is Haddie and I'm going to tell you my flood story. We have a barn and we took in about 10 horses from Yarrow because it was flooding in their barn. We also... my dad and mom's friend stayed at our house and so we had them for a couple of nights. For my sister to get to school, she had to drive an extra two to three hours around the highways.

Student 4: Hi my name is Hunter and this is the story about how the flood got to me. When the flood came, it got to our crawl space and there are a lot of family and baby pictures in there. So, when my dad realized that this was going to happen, he went down and got the pictures because they are really special obviously. And, when he when to go get them there was a bunch of water and when he got them, they were all wet – they were in a cardboard box – and so we had to get a bunch of towels and dry them all off. There were hundreds in there, so it took forever. But then we got a better box and put them in there.

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Student 5: My name is Dawson and my story about the flood is right after the flood when we started going back everywhere on the highway, I had a hockey game. Going back on the road was so weird because there was all this water everywhere.

Student 6: My name is Harlow and this what happened to me in the flood. So, my dad... well my mom was in Vernon, and my dad phoned my mom and told her not to drive home because the flood happened. And it was really happy because my mom would've probably got stuck there and that would not be very good. And then we took in some cows on our farm and we had some friends come over because their house was flooded. Also, my Auntie's house got really much flooded, too.

Student 7: Hello, my name is Olivia. This is my story about the flood. My mom woke me up, or maybe it was brother. I looked outside my room and I saw gallons of water on the floor. Everyone was freaking out but I was trying to stay calm. The water was in the kitchen, the living room, the dining room and my little brother's room.

I think it was my mom or my brother who spotted the water first. One of my favourite books at the time was on the floor and it is water damaged now but I still have it. It is called *Show me a Sign*.

Fast forward to the Friday, one road on the highway goes to my dad's house. There were cars submerged. I wasn't surprised that that happened. At the time it was just hard to understand and I just didn't want to think about anything that happened.

Student 8: Hi, my name is Isaac. My basement got flooded and my Grandma and Grandpa's house got flooded and my Grandpa was on the news. They have a house and they are living with my cousins right now but they lived with us for two weeks.

Student 9: My name is Avery and this is how the flood affected us. My power was out for a long time and lots of highways were closed. Luckily, I didn't get affected too much but other people might have got way worse.

Student 10: My name is Lane and I was affected by the flood and a lot of my family members were affected by it.

Student 11: My name is Alex and I remember the flood because my Grandpa went to bring our cows to another farm and I went with him. I remember the road looking like a river and I was really scared.

Division 7 Thompson

Stop Motion Film Transcript

This is a lovely little farm and then it turned into the flooding.

Oh no! It's raining! It's raining!

All the animals are panicking. The lightning is striking the houses. All the animals are panicking and trying to get into the barn.

As you can see, the farmers are trying to lead their animals into the barn.

Oh no! The barn is broken.

The have to get onto the canoe. The farmer is trying to save all of her animals by getting them off of the farm.

Oh no! The canoe is flipping! Look out for the cow!

Oh no!

Oh no!

Looks like some of the debris is falling into the river, making it hard to float in the canoe.

She's trying to save her animals.

Oh no!

Oh no!

Oh no!

Oh, look at the cow. They are floating with the debris.

Oh no!

Grade 3/4 Class – written submissions

At Greendale Community School, several of our students were directly impacted or know someone who was impacted by the flooding that occurred in November of last year. For our flood stories project, the students wanted to share their experiences by creating a stop motion film. Each component of this project was student-led and directed. Each student had an important role in the development of this video (background, animals, house, barn, editing, narration etc.). Students spent several hours working hard on the creation of this class project. Represented in this video is the story of a farm being negatively impacted due to the flooding. This story is a direct representation of some of the experiences that our students faced.

The following are some of the experiences from the students in our class:

“During the floods my cousin’s house flooded so they had to stay at my house for two weeks. It was pretty hard for them, but they turned out ok. And then they got back to their house, and everything was fine and then my basement flooded, and my dad had to work in it every day so I barley got to see him.” – Grade 3 student

“Whenever the flood happened my house flooded a little bit. My room got flooded a little bit, the dining room got a lot of water. We had to move everything because the water made little bumps, so we had to make it level, and we spent like \$10,000.” – Grade 4 student

“We had a bunch of horses at our house already and then so the flood was really bad, so my mom and dad had to go all the way around Chilliwack and we had 36 horses at our house at that time so some of the horses had to live on the field and they were standing in puddles in the fields. And a couple horses died from that.” – Grade 4 student

“When the flood happened, it flooded all around our house. There was massive puddle at the intersection, it looked like a big pond and our crawl space got flooded and we had to take a lot of things out of there and put them in the garage. And our backyard was also affected, it was completely flooded so we couldn’t go in our backyard.” – Grade 4 student

Our hope is that highlighting experiences of the students demonstrates how a community can come together and support one another during these tragic events. We recognize and appreciate all that farmers do in our own local community and how important it is to invest in supporting local farms in our own neighbourhoods.

UFV STORIES

I Drowned in the Flood, by Emili Kaplin

Last November the rain began pouring. For days on end, it did not stop. From up above the water fell, destroying land, killing animals, killing people*. Drowning me. Down and down the water poured, waist high in the blink of an eye. A month's worth of rain came down upon us all at once, as though God Himself was punishing us for the sins we had committed, and it was time for retribution. A thousand angels' tears cascaded down my face, down my body, and into the overflowing gutter. The stream quickly turned into a raging river that swallowed everything in its path. It consumed my sanity, my people, and I fell under and under, deeper and deeper.

I sank into the torrent, no longer breathing yet somehow still alive. It was as though I was a marionette held by a child, jerked to and fro for entertainment. Along the way, something solid brushed my hand, and I desperately scrambled to grasp it. A jagged piece of wood in the water, just as lonely and just as jagged as I was. It splintered and bloodied my hands, yet the pain was not comparable to that of the heavy-falling rain as I finally broke the surface. It fell with such ferocity it threatened to pull me under yet again; I clung to my makeshift lifesaver tighter, and the wounds cut deeper. No matter how loudly I screamed, how wretched my cries were, there was nobody to

answer my prayer to be saved. The exhaustion reached my frozen-solid bones, and I stopped the thrashing and the fighting. I silently accepted all that was to come and let my body be swept away by the downpour as though I never had existed, as though I was never meant to exist. My soul had given up, and my body sank like an anchor. I reached the point of no return. I drowned in the flood.

*No humans passed away in the flood; this statement represents how the author experienced the flooding events and felt about them.

Artist Statement for “I Drowned in the Flood”, by Emili Kaplin

“I Drowned in the Flood” is a story of me going through a very mentally challenging time during the time the flood was occurring. The flood itself is used as both literally and a metaphor for everything I was battling. There was a lot of fighting in my household at the time, and hearing about the chaos that the flood has caused and the lives it took, it broke me. I was mentally unable to deal with any of it. I was using vices to numb out all the struggles around me, although in the long run my vices caused me more harm than good. The ending describes me attempting to reach out for help but instead learning the hard way that I must be the person that helps myself.

Being able to write this piece gave me a way to verbalize all the pain I felt a year ago, some of it caused by the flood, some by my own family. It gave me a voice and a way to look back and say:

“I’ve healed from this. I have taken this experience and I have managed to grow from it.”

Untitled, by Rose Morrison

As floods Recede

vehicles speed along the highway

Abandoned cars on side roads make a jagged frieze

A submerged truck in the centre ditch sends warning.

Pale sun cannot break through the sadness of a sky that mourns for perished cows and hens.

As human life resumes

nature's sighs and prophets' cries

are muffled in the boom of traffic

Drowning, by Aidan van Delft

Artist statement for the sculpture "Drowning"

In November 2021 the Fraser Valley was devastated by record-breaking rainfall that resulted in flooding, landslides, and utter chaos. At this time, I was also a full-time student taking five courses, working twenty hours a week, getting ready for my wedding at the end of the year, and still trying to maintain some shred of a social life. On top of all this, my father was twelve hours away in Smithers, B.C., slowly dying from the cancer that was destroying his body. The highways were all closed, his health was deteriorating, and I had no way to get to him. At this time I honestly didn't know if I would ever see him again before he passed away.

All of these things were swirling around in my head, and I felt so overwhelmed that at times I would describe myself as drowning. I felt that all of these things were hovering over me, piling on top of each other, and trapping me underneath a crushing burden of stress and anxiety. Throughout this experience I knew that I was incapable of dealing with all of this on my own and that I needed to reach out for help, reach out to my family, my friends, my church, my God.

Using fabric as a medium that flows and ripples in a way similar to water, I created a visualization of my flood story. The hand reaching out is stiffened with glue: it is a

physical and structural representation of me reaching out for help. It needed to be hard and tangible so that I could be grasped in return (though I ask that you not touch the artwork). The rest of the piece is left untreated so that it can be draped and rearranged each time it is set up, thus making each installation an individual experience. By using the colour blue, I hope to closely link the sculpture to the story and theme of the flood, the narrative of water.

Another Apocalypse, by Anthony Biondi

A pillar of smoke drifted just above the horizon, a blot of black against the fiery red dawn. Walking my dog through our complex, I dismissed it for just another cloud. Perhaps it rested in a pocket of shade from another cloud. A passing woman corrected me. “No, that’s smoke,” she said.

Apparently, An RV storage went up in flames, threatening high voltage power lines which hung precariously over the flooded Sumas flats.

Following a week of biblically heavy rain, and catastrophic flooding, that pillar of smoke made the moment feel truly apocalyptic.

I consider myself fortunate. While the lower areas of Abbotsford were drowning, I lived at a higher elevation. For me, the rain only made driving and dog walking difficult. Meanwhile the news informed me of all the disasters happening around me.

Throughout this, I also kept in close contact with a friend and her husband who found themselves trapped in Hope. While on their way home from a convention in the interior, a washout on the Lougheed highway east of Aggasiz blocked their only remaining route home. The slide happened only minutes before they arrived at the site, and after a few hours of waiting in dead-stop traffic, they were rerouted back the way they’d come.

They were lucky. Not only did they avoid disaster, but a family in Hope took them in, giving them a place to stay. Meanwhile, people were taking shelter in schools and other public spaces, overcrowding the small township.

Abbotsford made headlines in Europe. For a town that frequently has to align itself with Vancouver to be recognized on a map, it became an international landmark.

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On social media, several posts emerged talking about the history of Sumas. How it had once been a lake: drained in the 1920's to make way for profitable farmland.

I worked at the Langley School Board Office at the time. My colleagues would frequently ask if my wife and I had been affected. I would thankfully answer no. None of my family were.

However, through my work, I had contact with some elders from the local First Nations, primarily for a language resource project; something I felt very passionate about. And, from them I heard talk of the lake, and its predicted return.

The sentiment was always the same: "My so-and-so always said the lake would return." Some aunt or mother or grandmother had shared this with them.

Meanwhile, the Nooksack continued to pour into the flats, fulfilling their prophecy.

Nature wanted that space back. Water settles where it wants to settle.

But maybe all this talk is fulfilling some deep hope. A prayer.

Now, I knew of the lake before this occurred, and of its draining. Yet, somehow it had not occurred to me that the First Nations in my own community, particularly the Sumas Nation, owed their livelihoods to the lake as their primary source of sustenance.

I can only imagine what it felt like for them in the 20's when the lake was drained. A final blow to an already impossible situation.

When I was a kid, my mother, a vehement Christian, would dream of the end of the world. She shared with me these visions.

She stood on the porch overlooking our backyard. Below her, all the people of the globe gathered, masses stretching to the horizon. For some reason I imagined the sky being a fiery orange.

My mother knew, they were all awaiting judgment from their Lord. They'd gathered there for that purpose.

The end times had come.

A sentiment she spoke of often.

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During my own lifetime, I'd experienced enough apocalypses to become desensitized to them. Y2K was my first. I waited with bated breath at my grandmother's house for the lights to go out suddenly at midnight. A harbinger of the end. But nothing happened.

9/11 did not factor into any predictions, though it felt apocalyptic. And once more my mother shared her predictions of the end times.

2012 came next, and a few other small apocalypses prophesized from priests in the States.

And along the road, I would hear over and over about how I had to prepare my soul. These are the end of days.

To me, these dreams and predictions my mother has are nothing more than a form of catharsis, the return to her maker whom she loves. The end times are a play at salvation from the difficulties and unfamiliar aspects of this world.

In many ways, the world has changed so rapidly in the 37 years I've been alive. I can only imagine the fear these changes can create. I can only imagine what desire there is to return to something more comfortable, safe, known.

When the lake was drained, it must have marked the end of an era for the Sumas First Nations in Abbotsford. A catastrophe I have not lived, nor could imagine what the impact would have felt like. An entire world erased and replaced with colonial agriculture.

Though I am a settler, and only an observer in these events, I can't help but feel the prayer in the words of the First Nations elders whose words I heard during the flood. The lake will return.

What is gone, may still come back.

The hubris of humanity comes in believing we can hold back nature.

Global Warming has taken a heavy toll on the planet. And we have proved over and over that we are not capable of rising to this challenge.

Now that the lake is once again drained, the city of Abbotsford learned a valuable lesson about its own aging infrastructure. Though, south of the border Washington did not dedicate themselves to strengthening the banks of the Nooksack River.

The lake may yet return.

I grew up in a time of apocalypses. But all that really means is change.

Just as the draining of a lake was the final blow on a slow apocalypse that engulfed the Sumas First Nations, western society and humanity as a whole continues to invite their own disasters.

One day our world will change again. It is changing.

Those farmers, businesses, and people whose lives were impacted felt the weight of that potential change. Once more, on the sidelines, I can only imagine what went through their minds.

Pick up and start again, or rebuild what was lost?

There is still that choice.

But maybe it is a sign of some change, of some slow and eventual apocalypse.

Though, despite what my mother believes, this is not the end. Only the beginning of something new.

Flood Story—Scratch That. Story about the Flood Time, by Aidan Spence

Man, it's rainy today. I thought nothing of the torrential downpour as I packed up for school. I noted it, but not much more. I was being driven that day, so I had little to worry about. I thought, at least. I thought this rain would cause me no issues. My fear laid dormant.

It wore the mask of other emotions, at first. Wonderment when, on the drive to the university, the freeway was swamped with rainwater. The tires of my dad's truck sent walls of water flying out from the paths they rode over.

The Flood Stories Project

My day started as usual; I only had one class that day, after which I would be going to my mom's. It was a short class, too. A seminar, only an hour. This made the fifteen minutes I waited all the more noticeable. Only about three students showed up in these fifteen minutes, which confused me. I had little idea what was happening.

I eventually wised up and decided to check the website, somehow before the other students did so. On the university website, it was revealed that my teacher had called off the class, due to the water. I was slightly disappointed, but I again thought nothing of it. These things happen, I thought.

I had no idea of the dam that was building in both the city and my mind, straining and ready to let loose the raging tides upon the landscape.

Cut to tomorrow, when my classes are cancelled again. Tuesday and Wednesday, classes are cancelled. I have no Wednesday classes this semester, so it is effectively just Tuesday. The fear has awoken by now, clawing at my brain. I may not feel its grasp, but its crooked fingers nonetheless prod at me.

Cut again, to Thursday. Classes are cancelled for the rest of the week. Sweet, I think. I don't want to bus to campus anyway. I take the opportunity to relax a bit, celebrate my time off. A rather short-sighted decision, in hindsight. But what could I have done anyway, had I let paranoia take hold this early on into the unfolding flood?

Regardless, by now I have started to notice that something is wrong. Seriously wrong, that is. I remember the fires that happened earlier in the year, and, thanks to them, these floods now qualify as a natural disaster.

It is surreal. It's a cliched phrase, but one never thinks it will happen to them until it does. The identity of 'it' doesn't really matter for these purposes. In this case, it's a flood. It applies to most natural disasters. Wars, diseases, et cetera. Even as someone who was not directly hit by the flood, the fear it rooted in me was very much real.

Wham! The dam burst, as it were, letting a tidal wave of panic wash over my mind. My fear struck then, as well. It leaped from the dark recesses of my mind, claws and fangs bared to strike.

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It then struck again, and again, and again. Each wave of bad news, of tragedy, it attacked even more ferociously. My mom's house was located on a hill, so it was not swamped by the water, although nothing stopped the bad news from doing the same.

My mom's house was located on a hill. At the bottom of the hill laid a flooded zone. It was chilling, that I was so close to the flood, even if I was in no danger. It brought a wave of paranoia to my brain, a wave it enthusiastically leaped onto.

This fear was driven on not just by sadness, but also by empathy. The tragedy felt far more real when it hit a community I was familiar with. Even if I did not know someone personally hit by the floods, they still felt far closer to me than someone in another country, or even another city that I did not know. Call it an unjust feeling if you wish, but it was certainly a present one.

School was put online for the rest of the semester, where social interaction goes to die. Online classes are a miserable time in and of themselves, but the ongoing flood, then post-flood, compounded the experience. I had very little in the way of social interaction, doubly so in-person, while dealing with all this. It contributed to a feeling of solitude, 'trapped' in Mom's house. My home was my castle, and a moat ran around its base. Only, this moat did more to keep me in than keep others out.

Keep in mind that my mobility was not particularly hindered, directly at least, by the flood. Everything around me was still able to function. However, it brought upon me a very sudden realization that I might not be so lucky next time. And that there would most certainly be a next time.

Cut one last time, to about a year later. I am still busing to school, in late November/early December. And this day is pouring rain. I am walking through multiple-inch high puddles more than once to get to the bus stop in the first place, and my umbrella is taking a heap of abuse under the torrential downpour.

Once I'm on the bus and have time to think, the first thing that strikes me is not wonderment, as it was a year ago. Wow, the puddles are so deep. Or something like that. It's the fear. Oh, no. Not again.

A Farmer's Story, by Jayden Talvio

In October 2022, I interviewed a long-time friend of my dad's, an Abbotsford farmer who has decided to remain anonymous, about his flood experience in November 2021. He invited me to his home office for this interview. Note that every time he uses the word "we," he's referring to himself and his employees. Here is his story in his own words:

"It was November 15th and we started seeing water coming up on the fields, so we knew that we were in a bit of trouble. The broiler farm which is over there—" he points to it "—we were supposed to ship those birds out the next day, so they were all ready to go to the market. I called around on the phone because there was all of a sudden talk of more water coming. We began sandbagging in the afternoon to try and keep the water out of those barns—" he points to them "—and I started calling processing plants so that they could come and try to get those birds out of there. I managed to get one processing plant to send a truck out and he succeeded in getting one of six floors out of the barn. We continued sandbagging into the evening to try to stop the water. As they were getting the birds out, water was coming up over the tires of the forklift. We thought we were going to beat it. Then, one of my guys¹ said to me, 'Look at the water coming over the freeway.' The water was filling up the farm like a bathtub— it was unbelievable.

By then, it was about 5:30pm and I told everybody, 'Just abandon the farm. Everyone get off.' I ran to the house and I told my wife, 'Have a bag ready, be ready to go just in case.' I got to the house and my long-Johns were soaked, so I took off my pants and shoes, grabbed my wife, and chucked my 'go' bag into the truck. I drove off, barefoot, wearing just my T-shirt and long-Johns. By the time we got to the corner, the water was coming into our truck.

My wife happened to be texting with some of her friends who lived up in Auguston. We ended up staying there for a couple of nights until we got reorganized.

"Yeah, it was a hard night, it was a really difficult night to be honest with you, 'cause I'll just be blunt. We lost a lot of livestock, like a lot of animals unfortunately died, and that was really hard for us to take.

"The next morning, we met at the Save On [Foods] up there." He points up the hill, and continues, "So, we were four guys in our 50s and we were all there at about 9:00 in the morning, bawling, 'cause we could see what had happened to the farm. The

power was still on in the barns when I got back, believe it or not, and we could hear feed bins running empty from up there.” He points up the hill, then continues, “The poor animals had no help, so we devised a plan to get some boats. Once we got the boats, we launched them at the back of the farm. We boated to our layer barn first, and the birds there were okay ‘cause they were in deep pit barns. The water was eight feet deep at that time.

“We lost all the turkeys in that barn, unfortunately. Eventually, our place was completely underwater. That day the flood happened we went around, opening up all the vents and doors so that anything that was still alive could breathe. We kayaked into each barn and turned the power off in each one ‘cause obviously water and power don’t mix. Once we got over the initial shock

of everything, it was ‘go’ time. My staff was so resilient— they were unbelievable. Then it was just a matter of being in touch with government bodies and industry support groups, who came and helped us.

“We wound up being mostly on our own, doing our own thing, having to figure it out. There were a couple days of that and then the city started shutting our water off. So now our birds that had survived didn’t have water. It was a miracle that our cattle found a small piece of

high ground and survived. That hit me pretty hard. I didn’t sleep that night ‘cause I thought, What’s going to happen to those poor cows? We were just working at trying to save as many chickens as we could. We helicoptered water into here and we got a humongous tractor with a huge trailer that contained a tank of approximately 15,000 litres of water. We pumped that water into the barns. All the animals were without feed for about three or four days.

The other hard thing was that my sons were stuck on the other side of the lake. I had to get them home somehow ‘cause they knew the farm so well. Their bosses said, ‘Go home and look after your folks. Do what you gotta do.’ So, when they—sorry, I thought I was past this.” Tears well up in his eyes. We take a quick break.

“My sons showed up on Wednesday [November 17th] and we got to work. We just had to push through. We took it one day at a time. We started working at 7:00am and I didn’t get home to our Airbnb until about 8:00 or 9:00pm. My sons and I organized the next day’s work, chopped it up— one day at a time. If we were to try and tackle

the whole thing at once, if you zoomed out and looked at it as a whole, it would have been overwhelming.

“That following Saturday, [November 20th] another miracle happened. We literally had forty people show up just to help— friends, family, kids, and then random people that just dropped in at the farm and said, ‘Hey, what can we do to help?’ ‘cause by then, the water was gone. It took a couple of days for the water to recede. We had people clean up our house, tear off drywall, and some brought big bins for us to chuck garbage into. With all this help, I was able to focus on cleaning up with my staff.

“We had to do some really ugly things that were not pleasant, and I hope we never see them again. All of us [Fraser Valley farmers] were immersed in an intense, trauma-filled environment. The cleanup was difficult. Yeah, like I said, the community was unbelievable, like having strangers pop in to help. Those three pictures are still up there,” he says, pointing at a few hand-written drawings. He continues, “There was a lady that showed up here with her kids and they didn’t know how to help, so her kids drew us those pictures. That lady showed up with a big bowl of chili and said, ‘Here, we want you guys to have this in there.’ We didn’t know who these people were. These kids have inspired us so much. Within two weeks of the flood, we were putting birds back into the barn. That barn there, I think,” he says, pointing to it.

“Three weeks after the flood, we were right back at it. We wouldn’t have been able to recover without the help of our staff, family, friends, and random strangers who showed up. They were incredible.”

Waterlogged, by Sha Scholtens

Sponge

Already filled with enough grief Christ

That's what he would say Higher water

Heavier heart

Selfless

Chest deep in water

I see him

Pulling, pushing, persistent Heifers heads

Helpless bellows

Farmers

In solidarity through

Udders

That's what he would have done Homestead defense

Herdsman's honour

Reminiscence

Indulged with every drop He sees me

Somber, solemn, sentimental Hands hot

Hands cold

Prairie

The herds green blessing Heaven

That's what I once thought Hallowed dairy

Holy water

That's not what I meant

Station 08MH103, by Sarah Brown

On November 13, 2021, the Chilliwack River measured between 1.6 and 1.8 metres high on the gauge: a normal reading for a soggy fall day. It reached 2 metres the day before, which is a level reminiscent of spring melts when brown waves carry errant logs downstream.

Station 08MH103 records the Chilliwack River's hydrometric data near Slease Creek and has measured its height in metres for 10 years, as well as its flow in cubic metres per second (m³/s) for 61 years. The graph shows that late spring and early summer have the highest average water levels, but short, extreme spikes tend to happen over late fall and early winter.

Weeks of cool temperature typically build up a snowpack in October and November, and then a wet tropical storm can blow through and wallop the winter mountains. If storm warms up to the peaks, then the river swells to twice as high as the annual spring melt for about 24 hours.

My family's house sits about fifty metres back from the bank of the Chilliwack. Our dining room table looks onto the colour of the waves. Sometimes they shine clear reflecting the light of the sky or glow with an emerald tinge. Sometimes they leap, silt-brown and hungry.

The voice of the river pervades our home: a cacophony of crashing water and swirling white bubbles bursting on the surface. The burble of a regular level goes unnoticed, while droughts are loud in their near-silence and high-water roars into every nook.

As a child on rainy nights, I would place a bag of favorite toys at the foot of my bed in case of evacuation and wish that the torrent would stop and that the walls would cease rumbling. One of my first nightmares was about a flood of thick, black tar.

1.8M

It rains all night on November 13. The decibel level increases.

3.0M

I wake up on November 14 and listen. The river's up. Way up. Water falls thick in sheaths slashing the ground and moving pebbles. The intensity of rain must have maintained itself since the evening before. Odd. Rainstorms usually have lighter and heavier squalls.

Looking at the gauge, I see that the river rose from 2.0 to 2.5 metres between 3:30 and 6:00 this morning, and then reached 3.0 metres by 9:00 a.m. Anything over three metres is fairly rare and occurs every couple of years or so. Tamihira rapids become like the Zambezi River in Africa. Enormous and fast. Unpredictable. Foreign.

My mother, younger sister, and I find out about the rainfall warning for hundreds more millimetres around 9:00AM when it's already this high. Fuck. We will have to prepare to evacuate today.

My parents were on this property during a previous flood (my grandmother picked my sister and I up from school, and we spent the night out of harms way). My father always appears relaxed during these events. They decided to remain at the house after the fire department delivered an evacuation notice in person. He said he saw salmon swimming on the lawn. And then the river started to drop. He is away hunting without cell service this time.

Swaths of rain attack the ground and slip off the already saturated earth straight into the river's centre flow. We yell to one another to be heard over the downpour and the current colliding with roots along the shore and moving boulders underneath. HOLY SHIT, LOOK AT THAT. HOLY. SHIT.

SHIT.

My father instilled a flood plan into my sister and I from a young age that involved packing everything up in vehicles and trailers and driving up the hill. Nothing was insured for flood damage since we lived on a floodplain. As long as we evacuated enough assets, we could restart and have an income again regardless of what happens to our home.

My mother spends the day packing up irreplaceable family documents. My sister and I connect trucks to trailers and pack them full of whatever we can in the relentless crashing of water. THAT HITCH DOESN'T FIT THE TRAILER BULB. SHOULD WE SWITCH IT? FUCK IT. LET'S UNLOAD AND BACK UP THE OTHER TRUCK.

3.5M

The flow almost gets to 3.5 metres by 11:00 a.m. The caravan-sized boulder on shore next to our property goes underwater, and the river reaches around it to steal the soil from the cedar trees which grip the edge with all the tenacity they can muster. The

intensity seems to drop. This could be the peak. Please, please be the peak. Then the power and telephone lines go down. A mudslide destroyed a couple telephone poles and covered the only paved road into town.

We have one cell phone with reception and a bit of data to look up station 08MH103 and hear news updates. We check every fifteen minutes to see if the rain is predicted to slow down or if the real-time graph is dropping.

I watch my sister sink two wooden stakes with measured markings into the shore to track the rising waters. THAT'S GOOD THERE, EH? YEAH, PROBABLY. The river starts rising again in the afternoon. It climbs back up to 3.5M and then continues.

3.7M.

3.8M.

3.9M.

There is a large increase in velocity between, say, 3.7 and 3.8 metres. It takes a huge volume of water at the centre of the river to show a corresponding increase on shore. Above 3 metres, it is no longer deadfall being washed away. Every couple seconds an entire green cedar tree hits the centre speedway and hurls past the house. The current moves so fast it makes me dizzy to try to follow the flow by sight. The decibel of crashing power is a better gauge in the moment. The sound sinks into my gut, confirming what I'd imagined in childhood.

4.0M

Night falls. We huddle around the fireplace in the dark house and take turns monitoring the bank and wood markers every hour. Socks squish as our boots sink into the soft, sodden soil along the river's edge and drops fall unnoticed onto our faces.

We ask one another: when do we drive up the hill? We ought not to do so too early. Potentially disastrous if we do so too late.

At 8:00 p.m., the gauge hits 4.0 metres. The creeks that flow into the Chilliwack become rivers of their own. If you put one foot into the main flow, you'd be swept away in a second unable to fight your way back to shore.

Part of the hourly surveillance starts to include walking up the driveway to make sure we could still drive up the hill. An incredible force tears at the shore directly upstream of our property as the water banks into a sharp turn. Physics twists as I look upstream and see a two-story wall of water slam into the forest and then ricochet back into the centre at the height of a one-storey building. The centrifugal force deepens the flow along the outer edges.

Water starts to flow down our driveway. The creek and culvert above us backs up until two feet of water covers the road and all the drainage ditches merge into one. The brave could still drive across and send huge sprays of water into the air.

4.2M

My sister and I duck into the sodden night to check the front once again close to midnight. Water streams in towards the garden and then, thankfully, turns to rejoin the flow. It's over 4.2 metres. It's time. I'm ready to drive the fleet up the hill. The rain isn't stopping. I'd rather do it now rather than 4:00 a.m. in a state of emergency. The crackling energy of the water makes it seem like the bank upstream will burst at any moment. An entire forest has been ripped out and transported downstream.

My mother, sister, and I convoy up the hill. The steep banks are slick chocolate brown oozing. They could slide at any moment.

Incredibly, as we teeter uphill in the dark with loaded trailers, my father's headlights greet us. They'd shot a deer so didn't need to be up north any longer, and he began to drive home faster after reaching the rainstorm. We leave the vehicles parked on the road overnight and return to the riverside to bunker down overnight

4.3M

The river holds overnight. The rain also stays steady. Exhaustion and indifference give way to brief periods of unconsciousness. I sit on the floor hiding from the terrible sound.

4.67M

The storm peaks on November 15, and the river tops out at 456 m³/s or 4.67 metres high. That's like 2,500 bathtubs being forced down an area that usually holds around 400 bathtubs. It's a new record. Between 1963 and 2020, the highest recorded level at 08MH103 was 415 m³/s on November 10, 1990. The lowest recorded level was 4.38

m³/s from October 5, 2017. This October got down to 0.34 metres. 4.62 m³/s.
Ankle-high water. No records broken this year.

Sandbags, by Clara Fairbairn

Sandbags.

Heaving, hauling, sweating, soaking,

Raining, pouring, drenched.

Packing, stacking, rows upon rows,

Families, traumatically wrenched,

From their homes, their animals,

Their barns, their crops,

All of it gone in a flash.

Heaving, hauling, sweating, soaking,

Raining, pouring, drenched.

Sandbags.

Metamorphosis, by Camryn Longmuir

Tiptoe in cold water, chills dance up your ankles.

Inch deeper, cautiously, like
a caterpillar scaling a flimsy leaf.

Deeply inhale.

Breathe in the crisp clean air, as it mingles with
sweet summer wildflowers and brisk musky pines.

Breeze swirling through your hair.

Steadily exhale.

Board the boat, paddle in hand. Birds chirp from above,
teasing your concentration.

Crouching, trying not to tip. With wobbly knees, sit.

Push off the unsteady ground and begin your chrysalis.

Submerging the paddle into the glass-topped lake, the water resisting
as it fights for stillness. Gliding along, each version of you dispersing
into expanding ripples flowing quickly downstream.

Gaining speed, disrupting peace,
a glimpse of the new you appears on the horizon.

You reach the beach and emerge
out of your silky cocoon, stretching out cold toes that grip the soft earth.

A butterfly floats
slowly over the wet sand,
flapping tired wings.

A Flood of Stories, by Michelle Superle

Found poem/love letter from-and-to *The Flood Stories Project*

Dedicated to everyone who shared their story with us. We are so honoured to be on this journey with you. Thank you for trusting us with your stories.

Witness and tell this story:

Once upon a time,
we did the best we could.

We got stuck in hope—
in our community, we did the best we could.
Still optimistic despite everything,
we feel blessed in hope, in our community,
time upon time.

So we tell this story, because
stories we tell and hold about our lives
determine
meaning we give to our lives.
Writing transforms the writer into something more
Powerful.

Once upon a time...

All night,
walking the farm, the moon behind the trees,
breathtaking and heartbreaking.
I took a walk and saw the sunrise.
What I saw was, to me,
A lifelong student of the living land,
Beautiful.
Clear skies in the distance hold out hope for relief.

It comes in waves, the thought—
we were being swept...we have each other...we pulled together...
we were able to go home together.
We feel blessed:

it comes in waves, the thought.

I just stand amazed
life never stopped.
Swirling clouds, big loops for wind—
it goes on.
The bittersweet sense of hope goes on—
we feel blessed in hope,
time upon time, I just stand amazed.

We focus on the silver linings.
We came together, in hope,
to care for each other and our land.
We did our best, still smiling.
The silver linings.
Out of the river of destruction
came an opportunity to come together.

We pulled together.
What I saw was, to me, beautiful—
the thought overcame me:
Hope.

Witness and tell this story:

Hope for the future,
once upon a time...

A Flood Story conversation between

Michelle Superle and Jerry Haak, UFV Logistics Generalist

Speaker 1: Michelle

Speaker 2: Jerry

Speaker 1: So tell us who you are and give me a little bit of background, Jerry. What are you going to tell us, why you've come to share your story, that sort of thing. They I'll pull up some questions if you'd like.

Speaker 2: Okay. My name is Jerry Hack. I am a member of Central Fraser Valley Search and Rescue here in Abbotsford, B.C. I've been a member of the team for close to 20 years now. I'm a search manager, which means that I take all the calls from the police, fire, ambulance, dispatch, whoever in B.C., and I organise the rest of the team that goes out in the field. So, yeah, I'm here to tell a story about the flooding that happened in 2021.

I'm here to tell the story of what our team, central Fraser Valley search and rescue did to help with the flood victims and the situation that was going on during that time. So it started out on... I guess it was the Sunday night. We started out handing out evacuation notices to certain areas in town. Just notices. All of us knocking on doors. And the water came pretty quick because it went from notices to alerts to evacuations, to members walking with their hiking boots on, asking for rubber boots to asking for hip waders to a full on: this is a water rescue situation. We need boats and we need to get people out of there. And that was all within the first 12 hours of the first day. And the water just kept coming and coming and rising and rising. And Abbotsford police started receiving more calls of people needing rescued from the flooding. So with the Abbotsford Police Department, we started organising rescues. I guess that started probably at around... I would say like two in the afternoon when we first started getting rescues coming. And then it just went from there. It just... more and more rescues started coming in, people needing help. And at that same time, because our base is located in the flood plain, we had to move our base and everything from our base up to University of the Fraser Valley and one of the parking lots. And at that point we realised that we're going to need a lot of help. So we started calling in resource teams, South Surrey, South Fraser, Search and Rescue, which is Surrey

Mission Search and Rescue. Unfortunately, we could not call Chilliwack Search and Rescue because they were going through the same thing on their site and at that time the highway was closed with water so they couldn't come and help us, and they were doing rescues on their side. And I believe it was Coquitlam search and rescue came to help us as well, as well as the Vancouver Marine 442 squadron for hover exits... helicopter exit search and rescues and it just kept going and going. I think there were 11 different agencies that we used to do the rescue. So basically the Abbotsford police was in one of our trailers and they're taking the 911 calls. They were handing paperwork over to us in our command truck, and we were in command and telling all these boat teams to go rescue people any way they can get there. The night and during the night again it was just 911 calls go to rescue people. We had a hovercraft, boats, helicopter. You name it. And it just went on and on and on. I think the first night we rescued over 100, I think it's 110 people we rescued. And then the very next day, you throw in the fires from the RV park. And just it was just chaos for a while, but it was it was a kind of an organised chaos that was great because we, like I said, with the helicopters going to pick people up, dropping them off at the university. We had a coast mountain bus, bringing them from the university to Tradex for them to hang out there. It was just it was crazy. So I think the first three days and nights we went 24/7. There is myself doing a 12 hour day shift managing and then another guy was doing a 12 hour night shift managing. At that time we were able to go back to our base and we had members sleeping at the base. And then the next four days we were able to put in 12 hours just hanging out at the base, able to stay there. But they let us go home on the condition that if we did get a call, we'd be at the base, which was not a problem, within 10 minutes. And there's some members that live really close, such as myself. We could be there within minutes. So. Yeah, wow. It was... it was crazy. We're all volunteers. None of us have trained for flooding. We have swift water rescue training, but nothing like this. Some of the water that was coming through the [inaudible] back along Highway 1 there. That was so powerful. It was pushing our jet boat. They could barely get through because of the current down on Whatcom by the gas stations. There were there was a lot of people stranded on that bridge. There was water coming through that river there. It was so powerful. It was pushing the boats up against the guardrail. It was pushing our hovercraft up against the guardrail. It was so strong. Cars were trying to come through that water and they were just getting stuck. So we were weaving boats and hovercraft around the cars and the signs. And it's just... It's crazy. It was absolutely... It was... nobody wanted to get rescued there because

nobody thought it would get that bad. And the next thing you know, everybody was there and they needed to get out. So we had hovercrafts. A member of our team has a hovercraft and he was just ferrying people back and forth, back and forth.

Unfortunately, I crashed our hovercraft.

Speaker 1: That's how you got your injuries?

Speaker 2: That's how I got my injuries. So that was out of commission. But it wasn't doing much with the current anyway. You'd think [it was] floating on air. It was just... it was still raining, so. Yeah. And then we had boats. Yeah. It was, it was... really, really intense. Intense for a while there.

Speaker 1: I can only imagine. Did you say 25 years you've been with search and rescue.

Speaker 2: 20.

Speaker 1: 20 years? I can only imagine that this must have been something like both your worst nightmare and your dream come true at the same time. Like, you would have been doing everything all at once that you don't have specific training for. And in a sense, that's kind of why you get into it to be able to help with this stuff. But the scale of it is mind boggling.

Speaker 2: And it was satisfying and heartbreaking at the same time. It was great working with other agencies. Like I said, the police, the fire, everybody was there. And we've done multi-agency tasks before, but nothing to this scale. We've had a church collapse up on McCallum. So we were part of that. We had a tanker truck tip over on the other end of town there, and we were a part of evacuations. I think the thing that they mostly compared it to was a snow... We had a big snowstorm about 25 years ago where the whole valley was just completely covered. And people were stranded as well. Yeah. And we actually had members crawling on the road trying to follow the yellow line because they couldn't see in the blowing snow. I don't know if it compares to that, but that was a big another multi-agency rescue, and it was a big disaster at that time, too, when that big snowstorm came. And of course, we help with them, and there's always flood evacuation going on. We help with that. Fire evacuation as well, we've helped with that. So yeah, this one, though, was something different and I don't know if we'll ever see it again. I hope not. But out of all that, we take notes and we're a bit more prepared if we do have to do it again.

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Speaker 1: Well, so, yes. It's been an amazing learning experience.

Speaker 2: Yes. For sure.

Speaker 1: For everyone involved.

Speaker 2: For sure.

Speaker 1: Wow. I have so many questions that aren't anything to do with my regular questions. One that I almost hate to ask. I don't know if I want to know the answer, but when I'm thinking about the timeline you were describing, when you were first talking about the first few days and like within the first 12 to 24 hours and going in and getting the calls, 911 calls to rescue people. And then you said even three or four days later you were still going in and rescuing people. Dare I ask who, what, where, when, why, how? Like, that's a lot of days.

Speaker 2: It's a lot of days. Some people some people just thought the waters would recede.

Speaker 1: So they were kind of like living on their top floor.

Speaker 2: Living on the top floor, yeah.

Speaker 1: And they called you when they ran out of food, or...?

Speaker 2: They just realised that the scale is a lot worse than what they thought. Some of those rescues where police would find a car in a ditch, and we would flag it. We were flagging the cars in the ditch that we've already gone in and kind of looked to see if there's anybody in there.

Speaker 1: So you had divers?

Speaker 2: No, we just kind of feeling... we were breaking a window and we would feel around cause we're not allowed to go underwater.

Speaker 1: Okay. So you didn't find anybody? No. We. Nobody died, right?

Speaker 2: Nobody.

Speaker 1: No human.

Speaker 2: No human. There was no human that passed away. But a few days later, the police would find a car that we didn't find that wasn't flagged. So then we have to go and check it out. Right. We have to go in and check it out. Like I said, there's a

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family [inaudible]. You know what? This is worse than we thought. We thought we try and wait it out, right? There's nothing we can do. We have to get out of here, right? You're running out of food. Whatever. So just. Yeah, situations like that were a couple of days later, we had to go in and check out a few places.

Speaker 1: Okay. And then. So yeah, that must've been strange with because I've worked with children a lot in this project, I often hear about animals, household pets and livestock and lots of stories of cats on the roof that you guys would go in and get and that type of thing. Was that very common? Is that like a big part of what you guys were doing? Or... And what were the logistics for that?

Speaker 2: To just come in and if we're rescuing a family, [they ask] do you happen to have room for our cats?

Speaker 1: Well, that makes sense. But like, were you guys toodling around just like, I don't know, doing search grids and there's a dog or a cat and you just grab them? Or did that happen or never happen? Or was it always calls?

Speaker 2: It was always calls.

Speaker 1: Yeah. Okay.

Speaker 2: A funny story, if I can tell this, please.

Speaker 1: Yeah. Of course.

Speaker 2: So we got a 911 call saying there's a guy who went through a roadblock, put his truck trailer in the ditch and he needs rescuing. And in all amongst that conversation, we heard the word crocodile.

Speaker 1: That's the story today on here today!

Speaker 2: Yeah. So we put our call out to the team that was close by. Can you go rescue so-and-so who's standing on his truck?

Speaker 1: But careful. There might be a crocodile.

Speaker 2: There's a crocodile. A crocodile or an alligator. I can't remember which one.

Speaker 1: Who cares? It's still got sharp teeth!

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Speaker 2: So the lady out there, on the radio, like, she pauses and says, Excuse me. And she said, Yeah. We said, Yeah. Please be aware there may be a crocodile. What this guy was doing, he was trying to get to his home where he has his pet crocodile in his trailer. Not on the trailer. On his truck. It was in his trailer on his property. He was trying to get to his property. To get to his trailer. To get his crocodile. It was all the confusion. It didn't sound like that. It said, Come on, rescue me. I'm on my truck. I'm standing on my truck with a trailer with a crocodile. [Inaudible] ...he's standing on a hay bale and apparently all the mice don't want to get wet and they started coming up the hay bale. So yeah. So there is that story where it's first of all, what are you doing going through a barricade? Yeah.

Speaker 1: Oh, I think a lot of people did.

Speaker 2: Yeah, a lot of people did.

Speaker 1: And it was almost always about animals. Yeah, yeah.

Speaker 2: So funny story, though. It was just... I mean, I know it's not funny, but it was just the reaction... I remember on the radio thinking, excuse me! Like I said, it was at his home, in his trailer on his property, no crocodile and floating.

Speaker 1: So I haven't read this story yet. Did you ever find out what happened with the crocodile?

Speaker 2: We rescued him. Because he was standing on the hay bales at the time. That's funny how you have that.

Speaker 1: Yeah, it's, it's sort of like a parallel project. With a bit of a different focus.

Speaker 2: So there's... families and people that refused help the first time. But it was very frustrating.

Speaker 1: Yes.

Speaker 2: Because I think there was one house where we sent first a helicopter to and they said no and we sent a boat to and they said no. And then the third time, the police is like, they're going to wait because this is our third time wasting our resources, wasting our time if they're going to say no anyways.

Speaker 1: The police can't order them or force them?

Speaker 2: You, you know, I guess under the evacuation order you can force them but. They're not going to do this to a couple of volunteers showing up in a boat. So, yeah.

Speaker 1: Hmm. Okay. Let's backtrack a minute. The animals, the livestock. You know, when you run out of time. I have not I have not pursued this in my research, like looking into any details. And I haven't wanted to ask any farmers about this. And that's who I mostly been interacting with. But I've heard about tens of thousands of cows, chickens, pigs dying.

Speaker 2: I heard close to a million chickens, you know, chicken, 400,000 chickens in a barn. But, yeah, I don't know... I just heard that number.

Speaker 1: Yeah. Yeah. So these huge numbers circulating that we can't even make sense of, like, what does that mean? So you were not called to do any kind of animal rescue or livestock rescue. Strictly human. And this is a horrible question, but, um, did you see... anything? No?

Speaker 2: I saw nothing. Which I'm glad of.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: But I just see what's on the news. All the people rescuing. Farmers with their friends and boats and stuff like that.

Speaker 1: Yeah. Yeah, those are the rescues, but what happened. Like, I don't understand the other side. What did that mean? I have no idea what it looked like. Were they all in barns?

Speaker 2: Yeah, I have no idea what that looked like. It was a little bit frustrating for us because during that time of the first night or two days, we getting everybody with a boat, canoe, kayak, rubber dinghy. Can I come and help? Can I come and help? And with the instructions from the police. It's like no. Yeah, no. And then all these people are getting mad at us saying, why can't we come and help?

Speaker 1: Well, cause it'll be chaos.

Speaker 2: Chaos, exactly. And if you wreck your boat... I mean, we put a great big hole in our little boat.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

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Speaker 2: That was your boat. Who's going to get blamed for that? I am. Because I said yes. So it was it was frustrating at that point because people [inaudible] I understand, people want to help. Do you know what? The community was absolutely great to us. It was so nice for the community to come and help us out in ways that they could. Yeah, we had a church group come and feed us meatloaf and potatoes, which was huge. And there's 35 of us and it was great. We had like, all the big food chains, Subway and Tim Hortons and Panago. We had so much food coming in and drinks and water.

Speaker 1: That's how you can keep going.

Speaker 2: And we are so grateful for all that. It was just absolutely positive for us. So, but on the other hand, you got all these people saying, well, why can't we come and help? Those guys aren't doing their job and they're no good and so, you know, so yeah, it was... we had to put all that negativity behind. We just kept focussing on the positive that came out of all this with, with the community. Yeah. Because that's all we can do.

Speaker 1: Yeah. I think that's been everybody's takeaway. I mean, what else can you do? Yeah, yeah. Just grab onto those silver linings and hold on tight.

Speaker 2: Exactly. Yeah. The university and the city was so great for us. So great to us as well. So.

Speaker 1: Yeah, yeah. Amazing. Yeah. Um, so one of one of the guys in these stories. This guy was talking about... he does have a boat. He's a fisherman, whatever. And he did go in and help.

Speaker 2: Because we can't stop them.

Speaker 1: Right. Okay. Some of them just went in.

Speaker 2: Well, yeah.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Speaker 2: I mean, we can't stop them.

Speaker 1: He actually talks in his interview about dinging his boat on this, that and the other thing. And he accepted responsibility because he knew that it was his responsibility, but... Yeah. Interesting. Okay.

Speaker 2: Like when I crashed our hovercraft, the fire hydrant was just under the water.

Speaker 1: Yeah, that's exactly what he said.

Speaker 2: All the berries out in the fields. With the poles? Yeah, they're just *just* under the waterline.

Speaker 1: Yeah, so all those things are hazards. Interesting. Okay. Well, here's a question I'm thinking of. What was your lowlight and your highlight of the entire time?

Speaker 2: Honestly, my lowlight was getting injured and crashing. I was scared. I thought I broke my arm. I didn't really care about the hovercraft at the point. It's just, now I'm in danger. And now I've got people trying to rescue me. And I know what our motto is: self, team, others. It was disappointing on my part because I am trained to operate a hovercraft... but not at night, not in a flood when I am trying to operate a hovercraft. So that was that was my lowlight for me personally, because that was the night of my wife's birthday. Her birthday was that day. So here we are sitting in emerge for 8 hours. Her tending to me. Right. Happy birthday, dear. So that for me that was my lowlight as far as the whole the whole situation. I don't know. I just... I just... It was just... It was hard to fathom right away. It was just hard to take it all in. And obviously, the highlight was the community for the way they treated us afterwards. You can't say enough about it. It was so nice what they did for us and just, for everybody. Yeah, it was just so nice to see all that.

Speaker 1: Okay, so tell me a bit about why and how you got into search and rescue, what you enjoy about it.

Speaker 2: Okay. So a long time ago, close to 30 years, I had a nephew pass away in a flood. I was living in Ontario at the time. And the things that search and rescue did for my father in law and my sister in law who lost her son and my mother in law... the things the search and rescue did for them to help to try and find him, just completely blew me away. Completely blew me away. Like, they rerouted a river during flood season to find him. And this is a rubble creek up in Squamish. They basically rerouted that river to try and find my nephew. And I just thought that was unbelievable. It was amazing. We moved out here, went to a sportsman show, at Tradex, and I saw that they had a booth there. Hey, we're looking for more volunteers. I said, I'm in. You got to try. I've gone up through the process over the years. I was a

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water rescue guy. I was an avalanche rescue guy. I'm a team leader. And then I got into being a manager. I was vice president on the team for two years. I was on the executive for probably nine. It's just interesting stuff. Every call is different. You get great friendships out of it. Lots of activities, lots of things to do that I thought I'd never do, like climbing in and out of a hovering helicopter. Yeah, I never thought I would be doing that.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: Yeah, just stuff like that. Swimming in class three rapids. The training is amazing. The people are great. So yeah, it just appealed to me right away because of what they did. And I see their point of trying to help people. And that's what it's all about, just trying to help people. So.

Speaker 1: Um, okay, so I need to backtrack a step here. You lost a nephew? In a flood? So then what was going on in your heart with all this?

Speaker 2: We're in Ontario, and at the same time, my wife, grandmother passed away. So we drove from Ontario to here non-stop, 48 hours.

Speaker 1: Impossible.

Speaker 2: Toronto is 4800 kilometres from there to here. And we just did it. And it was in March. So we had perfect weather on the way here. It just seems like amazing roads were clear for us all the way. Me and my brother in law, we just kept passing off, driving. We just got home because we wanted to get here. Of course, for my sister in law and for the rest of the family who just lost a grandmother... we just had to get here and try and support as best we can. And like I said, search and rescue was flying my father in law from Abbotsford to Squamish every day so he can be a part of what was going on up there. And bringing them home, flying back and forth. Yeah.

Speaker 1: Wow. Yeah. And you mentioned that it's common for you guys to do evacuation calls and so on with flooding in the Fraser Valley. Yeah. Routinely throughout your past 20 years, but obviously nothing of the scale of the flooding. But when you're in any kind of situation that involves flooding, do you think of your nephew?

Speaker 2: Not really.

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Speaker 1: No?

Speaker 2: I did on a certain call. I thought of my nephew. But not during the flooding. It was a separate call. Yeah. Another one where it was me that found a five year old girl in the bottom of a pond. I know, and I'm a volunteer. I don't get paid for stuff like Danger Pay. I don't. And it's just.. it's just eats at your heart.

Speaker 1: Do you guys get trauma processing?

Speaker 2: Yes. It's critical incident stress management system, is what they call it.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: And for calls like that, they call them right away. And we all go back to the base after that call. Just to talk about it. Everybody, it doesn't matter if you witnessed or you were in command or you were watching. Everybody that was a part of that call that goes back to the base. And we have a CISM meeting, it's a debrief meeting and we talk about it. So I definitely needed it that night. And we had CISM for the flooding, too.

Speaker 1: Yes, I'm sure. But, so, who leads that? Or does somebody come in?

Speaker 2: It would be the manager. It would be the manager who calls the system team. And then and they walk through and they'll come down from wherever. There's actually there's a couple of team members on the system. North Shore has a couple. South Fraser/Surrey has a couple. They'll get here the best way they can.

Speaker 1: Do they have special training in that? So, they facilitate that process. Interesting.

Speaker 2: It's a really interesting programme.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: It's really cool.

Speaker 1: I'd love to see that because I developed a style of writing workshop to help people process experiences and incidents that they've had. So I'm curious to know if there's any kind of overlap. I'll send you my stuff.

Speaker 2: I can give you a fridge magnet.

Speaker 1: Yeah, I...

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Speaker 2: I can bring you a magnet. I can bring you something that has some information on who to contact.

Speaker 1: Yeah, that'd be great. Yeah. Thank you. Okay.

Speaker 2: Are you in next week?

Speaker 1: I am. I'll be in on Tuesday. Yeah. Okay. So what helps you meet the challenges that you encounter when you're doing search and rescue?

Speaker 2: Teamwork. Yeah. We're a big happy team. Yeah. For each task, we either send out three or four members, and it's just constantly positive, and it's just teamwork. It's all about teamwork. And that gets us through.

Speaker 1: Great. And what are three words that describe your personal value system as you're engaging with your search and rescue work?

Speaker 2: Three words... Commitment, because it is a huge commitment. What else... Two other words? Well. Let's just say... I'm trying to think here...

Speaker 1: That's okay.

Speaker 2: Commitment. Kind of like a friendship because we're all our family, because we're all... we're all one big happy family, whatnot. Most of the time we're one big, happy family. Yeah. I don't know. I've never thought of that. Thinking of three words.

Speaker 1: It's all good.

Speaker 2: You know what? Courageous because sometimes we have to be. We have to be courageous and to be strong to do what we do. And it depends on the call. Every call is different. An example of where we had to be strong for each other was we had to go rescue a guy that had a heart attack up on the Abbey Grind here in town, and the call went within minutes from a rescue to a recovery. So we got there and we had new members at the time. And we had to... we had to go from this is a rescue, hurry up and get up there, to how are you with a body recovery? Because it just went like that. So, yeah, you have to be courageous. And if you don't feel that you can do it, you have to be strong and say that I cannot do it. And we asked them, if you don't want and because we're not going to make fun of you, we're not going to kick you off the team. If you don't feel that you can be ready to go do this, it doesn't matter. We have somebody else who can do it. We've had senior members that can do

this. We can use you somewhere else. Like I said, we're not going to kick anyone off the team. We're not going to laugh at you. We're not, because somebody recovers... we're pulling a body out of the water that's been in there for days, weeks, months. It's not a pretty sight. If you don't think you can do it, then just don't do it. So if you if you're courageous enough or strong enough to tell me that you do not want to do this, that's fine. That's perfect. If I'm not strong enough to want to go and do that. Then that's fine.

Speaker 1: Geat. Mm hmm. Thank you. A couple more?

Speaker 2: Anytime. I'm on my lunch break now. Final answer time. Okay.

Speaker 1: So three more... which life experiences and values served you well during the flooding crisis.

Speaker 2: Which life experiences has served me.

Speaker 1: And values.

Speaker 2: I don't know. Stay calm. Just roll with the punches and just do what we're asked to do. That's what we're somewhat trained for. So let's just go in and do it. Being calm and positive. You know, we had members out there for 12, 14 hours. And if they're constantly on the boat, rescue people and they start to feel a little bit down, you know, you got to go in there and try to encourage them.

Speaker 1: Physically or on the radio?

Speaker 2: You know, sometimes they'll come back to us if they can. Most of the time it's just on the radio because they're putting in long nights, long days.

Speaker 1: Do you remind them to...

Speaker 2: You know what? And eat and drink and you know what? You're going on 12 hours. Why don't you come in. Yeah. And let somebody else do you get some rest somewhere and. Yeah. Just you don't have to do everything.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: There's other people that can do it as well. So. I hope that answered your question.

Speaker 1: Yeah, absolutely. What have you learnt about yourself through the experience of the flooding?

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Speaker 2: Expect the unexpected. Yeah, we get that all the time with search and rescue. Just, um... maybe I should read up a little bit more about flooding. In fact, certain areas are in the situation because like I said, we've never experienced that before. But now, now it's good to now have the knowledge for the next one if or even if it's just like I said, we do evacuation notices down there in Fort Langley and Glen Valley all the time. And those homeowners. Oh, you again? Yeah. I'll see you next year. Yeah. You again. Yeah. And it's. Oh, it's not even close to what it was last year, but I got fire starter for this little notice that you gave me. So they're getting that experience now. Yeah, for. For this. I'm sure it's going to help. Yeah. Somewhere down the line, they may help. Which is great.

Speaker 1: Wonderful. But in terms of what you learnt about yourself, I mean, for me, what I'm hearing you say about your experience in the flooding was that obviously, besides the scale and the, I guess you would say the terrain, the main difference was it seems like, well, the hours. But you got injured. Yeah. It sounds like you feel disappointed.

Speaker 2: I was I was definitely disappointed in myself for getting injured while I thought it. I never thought about what's underneath the water. I just thought about for I was focussed on getting to this car that was in the ditch with somebody potentially in it. I never thought of crashing up, obviously, but things do happen and you kind of just have to move on. Yeah. And even though I was injured in the rescue situation, I was still able to help everywhere else. If I had to have my arm in a sling or up like this for a long time, I was still able to help somewhere else, which was which was huge for me because I wanted to be a part of that. Like I said, we were had members putting in long days and long nights, including myself. And at that time, there were only two managers available to do what we had to do. Yeah.

Speaker 1: So. So did your accident, did it happen after you'd been doing long hours? Long time?

Speaker 2: No, I was probably out for about eight, maybe nine, 10 hours. I would already. Yeah. So.

Speaker 1: And that's when it happened?

Speaker 2: That's when it happened.

Speaker 1: Was that day one or two?

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Speaker 2: Oh, day one. Oh, the first night. Yeah. So Monday we were up here. Yeah. Yeah. It was the first day, I guess I was in the hospital for 8 hours. I don't know what day it was, but yeah, it was the first. It was my wife's birthday.

Speaker 1: So...

Speaker 2: It was the first night I believe, and I was out, like I said, probably for 8 to 10 hours already. And you know what? As a manager, I could have said to myself, you know what, I'm going to take a break. Yes.

Speaker 1: But we never do that for ourselves.

Speaker 2: We were out there already. We were kind of right in the middle of where everything was happening, even just for us to get back. It was a journey. Yeah. So for the ambulance to come and get me, it was a journey for him because he was down in that water area. Yeah. And so I had to get from where I crashed my hovercraft to get back to land, walking through the water up to here.

Speaker 1: Oh my.

Speaker 2: To get a ride from the bridge to the other side and just to get in there once again. It was, it was it. And I had to bring the hovercraft back and there was other people with me that I had to worry about as well. There was other we had a south Fraser had a boat in the water too. So being a senior member I had to worry about them. I had to worry about my hovercraft. I had to worry about the person that was in the boat.

Speaker 1: All this while you were in pain.

Speaker 2: All this intense pain. Huge pain. Yeah.

Speaker 1: So if I had to summarise, what it sounds like you learnt about yourself is that you're not perfect.

Speaker 2: I am not. I'm far from perfect. I am far from perfect.

Speaker 1: And even when you know the best practises. Yes, you do. And you do something that in retrospect, it's easy to say, oh, I should have...

Speaker 2: I shoulda, woulda, coulda. But that that's the way that hero complex comes in. I can do it. I can. I want to be the guy.

Speaker 1: Yeah. Yeah.

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Speaker 2: And obviously, I didn't learn from myself because I don't have to be the guy. I don't have to be the one doing it.

Speaker 1: So, no, I think a lot of people had that and took themselves way past their capacity. Oh, for sure.

Speaker 2: Oh, sure.

Speaker 1: Yeah. Bad things happened either to their bodies or mind or spirits. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay, last one. What makes you the most proud of how you dealt with the situation your whole time in the trenches.

Speaker 2: Super proud of the team. Of our team as well as the team are two teams that came in to help us. We just we just all moulded together and gelled. And it worked out great. Everybody got along. Everybody knew what to do. And everybody was willing to help on our team as well as community, but on our team with all these different agencies coming in. It was hard because we called Mission to come and help us. But of course, Mission couldn't come because once it got across the bridge, there was water there and the road was out and there we had to do evacuations there. So we asked permission to do the evacuations on the Mission site.

Speaker 1: Right.

Speaker 2: When Coquitlam came, they actually came to rescue a guy that tried going up and over. The Abby grind. He tried going up and over that to get to his girlfriend's place, and he got lost up there. So we had Coquitlam search and rescue with theirs, with their members to go rescue or somebody who was not supposed to be there in the first place. So yeah. And then all the like with the with Northshore Search Rescue and just yeah, everybody that came in Vancouver police, it was just the way we all gelled and work together because we don't we don't train as a big group. We might train with a fire department here or there or another team, but not when there's so many different agencies coming together.

Speaker 1: And you could have too many cooks in the kitchen.

Speaker 2: Sure. For sure. And it just worked out well. Everybody knew their role. Yeah, and we just went from there. And like I said, with those other incidents that we had where we've used multi-agency before, we all know our role.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

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Speaker 2: And we just stick with it and it works out great.

Speaker 1: So that's the thing you're the most proud of, but you were in a management role there, so you were facilitating all that coordination and collaboration. How did you do it?

Speaker 2: I had huge support from the other members in my in my team, in my truck. Yeah. We had a guy on the radio and that. A guy on the computer just doing a mapping.

Speaker 1: Right.

Speaker 2: And with those other members there and I'm just basically crossing my arms and overlooking and saying, yes, perfect. Do this, do that.

Speaker 1: Right, right, right.

Speaker 2: We just gelled. And that's how it was during the day as well. Or during the night shift. Yeah, it was just... Hey, can you go get a boat and can you go out there? Absolutely. Let's go. We're on our way. I need three guys here. Here, everybody just stepping up and ready to roll. We had nine water members on our team, it was where can I help? What can I do? What do you need? Where do you go? Get gas for their jerry can. Getting to run the generator. I'm going to get some food, some coffee for you. Just... everybody was just doing what needed to get done to help everybody else.

Speaker 1: So part of your role then, in that situation is a kind of like dispatch? Yeah? Interesting. Okay. I said that was the last question, but I have one more. I'm sure it's been a year.

Speaker 2: Yeah, it was funny... we were training on November 18th, which is my wife's birthday, and we were playing some sort of a game in the dark, capture the flag in the dark, through a forest. And I said, I promise I will not get hurt this year.

Speaker 1: Is that what you guys do for fun?

Speaker 2: Well, sometimes. We train every Tuesday night, and there's a team building exercise. Yeah, that's all it is.

Speaker 1: I remember Capture the Flag from Girl Guides. It was my favourite.

Speaker 2: We have to. You know, every once in a while is good to do something like that.

Speaker 1: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Just blowing off steam.

Speaker 2: So anyhow.

Speaker 1: Okay. Yeah. No, it's been a year. We've had the one year anniversary, amazingly enough. I don't know about you, but I'm sure it's the same for you. I know for me and people in the trenches, it feels like we've been... So go, go, go. With whatever projects we've had for them. Recovery. For me, trying to document it, it feels a little bit like it's been hard to sit down and process everything and kind of make sense of it and just like, Wow, it's been a year. This is what's happened. I mean, we're okay, everything is okay, more or less, except for some of the farms and farmers. But. What is your what is your state after a year?

Speaker 2: I feel good. I'm glad it's not happening again. Yeah. I feel...one of the farmers has touched a little bit close to home for my wife and I because she works with a lady who was deeply affected. Her house was red tagged pretty much right away. And for them, their whole process of trying to get help and relief and all that has been taking a long time. So I feel frustrated on their part. But I'm just... for me, I'm happy. It's been a year. I'm happy it's over. It's been a year. And it's great to reflect. It's good to tell the stories. It's good to learn from it. So, yeah, see what happens. Like, if it ever happens again. And we have that knowledge of what to do, what to expect, and where to go from there. Yeah, this co-worker of my wife, like I said, her house was red flagged, so. On that property. She had to build... Put a mobile trailer there. Yeah. And that. Is coming out of their pocket. Yeah. And so they had to get that ready. And then in the process of getting this brand new trailer where they're living in it, it's kind of like a lemon. Pipes were leaking, the floor was lifting. This is supposed to be a brand new trailer. So they actually ended up having to go back into this mould. Infested, water damaged home because they had to get their trailer out to get a fix. And in that process, while they were in there, it caught fire. So they lost everything. And they got no relief from the government. None. Absolutely nothing from the government because it was it was a farm. I think because it was classified as a hobby farm. And they're just... they're getting kicked. Mm hmm. Left, right and centre. And they get in, but they're getting back up and they're trying to stay positive and actually going out for work, for dinner tomorrow night. And I'll talk to them more tomorrow to see how they're doing. But it's just kind of unfair. Exactly. It's like I know a lot of people are getting helped and it's great. But here's somebody that needs it.

The Flood Stories Project

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: After what they've been through.

Speaker 1: Well, that's actually why I started this. Well, one of the main reasons I started this project, so. Yeah, I hear that.

Speaker 2: It was a really weird feeling after the flooding, you know, all the roads were closed, but when they started opening up again, just driving down there at night and all you see is studs and all the drywall is piled up. And I've seen all the insulation, all you see it runs dry out ah studs and heaters and lays destroying everything. And it's like, I just... I can't imagine this. Like, I forgot it if I lose power for 12 hours.

Speaker 1: Yes, I forget it if I lose 5 minutes, you know? Right.

Speaker 2: So I just can't imagine what they went through. Yeah. Especially like with the farmers that lost thousands and thousands..

Speaker 1: Thank you so much, Jerry. That is such a rich story. Thank you.

MEDIA STORIES

Flood Stories to be on display at The Reach

By Anne Russell, January 20, 2023

<https://blogs.ufv.ca/blog/2023/01/flood-stories-to-be-on-display-at-the-reach/>

This photo by UFV student Adam Magalhaes, taken near Whatcom Road during the November 2021 Sumas Prairie flood, won second place in the photography category in the Flood Stories Expressive Arts contest.

The Flood Stories Project

UFV's Flood Stories project collected introspective and impactful stories, images, art, and insights from people affected by the devastating Sumas Prairie flood of November 2021 and related environmental disasters.

Now the public will be able to view the results of the project at a special exhibition at Abbotsford's The Reach Gallery Museum. The Flood Stories project will be featured in The Reach's community arts space from January 27 to March 18. The exhibition will also feature eyewitness narratives, compelling stories, and images of people affected by the floods that were collected through the Climate Disaster Project and featured in the Fraser Valley Current e-newsletter.

Dr. Michelle Superle, a UFV English professor and research associate with UFV's Food and Agriculture Institute, organized the Flood Stories project with the help of research assistant Sydney Marchand, a recent BA grad.

Superle notes that the Flood Stories project is an example of how UFV can be a leader in engaging the community through an approach that leverages the power of the humanities, including written narratives and artistic expressions, to highlight the importance of agriculture.

“Art is a powerful tool for communicating broad, abstract concepts such as climate change and regional food security, both of which tie in the devastating Sumas Prairie floods,” she notes.

“Art is a powerful tool for communicating broad, abstract concepts such as climate change and regional food security, both of which tie in the devastating Sumas Prairie floods” — Dr. Michelle Superle

“The inspiration for the Flood Stories project was two-fold: to create space for everyone who wanted to share their flood story to tell it in their own way, and to

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demonstrate respect for the local farmers who work so hard to feed us. The ultimate purpose of both parts of this project was to support healing. Responses to the project have exceeded our expectations: the stories and art people have shared are incredibly powerful. They demonstrate the best, most beautiful facets of humanity — hope, collaboration, and persistence. We are grateful to have met and worked with so many wonderful members of the community on this project. Thank you for trusting us with your stories.”

The exhibit opens at the Reach just in time for Family Literacy Day on January 28, which is appropriate, notes Superle, because the exhibit features many works by children, a result of working collaboratively with the Abbotsford School District for the Flood Stories project.

The Flood Stories project engaged farmers in the Fraser Valley who were affected by the November 2021 extreme flooding events, inviting them and their families to share their experiences in spoken, written, and artistic format. The project used a narrative approach to better understand how Abbotsford farmers have been affected by floods and what they need to begin thriving again.

In addition, a contest was held for school children from Abbotsford and Chilliwack in grades K through 12, as well as UFV students, staff, faculty, and alumni.

“We recognize that the flood was a very unusual and traumatic experience for many people, both those whose properties flooded and those who observed their fellow citizens undergoing extreme stress,” notes Superle. “We thought it was important to tell those stories, record them for posterity, and learn from them. Telling their story can also be therapeutic for those affected.”

The Flood Stories expressive arts contest and winning entries can be viewed here and in person at The Reach starting January 27.

The Fraser Valley flood, through children's eyes: Concern for cats and the loss of Lego punctuated post-flood stories told by children who lived by 2021's Fraser Valley flooding

By Tyler Olsen, January 24, 2023

<https://fvcurrent.com/article/fraser-valley-floods-kids/#jump>

Lego and pets.

Those were the two things that Michelle Superle remembers after listening to children describe how they experienced the 2021 Sumas Prairie flood.

Hundreds of thousands of words have been written chronicling the experiences of that year's incredibly wet November. But Superle noticed that the voices of one set of people were missing: that of children. Hundreds of children fled from the rising waters that month too, including Superle's own kid.

But their memories and stories largely went untold in the media because of their age. So Superle, a UFV English professor and Yarrow resident, sought to change that.

Last year, Superle launched a special project to solicit art and written memories from children who lived in the areas affected. This week, an exhibit showcasing those and other memories collected in UFV's Flood Stories Project will debut at The Reach Gallery Archives in Abbotsford. You can find students' award-winning projects [here](#).

On Saturday, the gallery hosts an awards ceremony and children's celebration from 11am to 2pm with a story time, poetry activities, group art project, philosophy circle and more. (The Climate Disaster Project stories co-produced by The Current will also be featured.)

After deciding to help children tell their stories, Superle spent time in Upper Sumas, Barrowtown, and Greendale elementary schools—the first two of which sit on Sumas Prairie and had been flooded.

From her conversations Superle says she noticed that children described the experience quite differently than adults. The children frequently talked about having to leave the family cat behind when they left their homes. (Families were often able to take dogs with them.)

“That really strong focus on and connection to the pets is very interesting,” she said.

The kids expressed worry about the cats—and happiness when they were later reunited with their precious pet. (Superle didn’t randomly sample or survey the children: the stories she heard were the ones the kids were comfortable telling. And if darker stories lurked, the children didn’t share them.)

The general sense she got was that the children had weathered their experience remarkably well.

“I do sometimes have an issue when people are like ‘Kids are so resilient,’” she said. “It’s not that simple.”

But she gave credit to the amount of support the children who were evacuated had received.

The loss—and use—of Lego was also a recurring theme, Superle noticed. While many adults mourned the destruction of priceless memorabilia, kids had to cope with their own losses, including their Lego.

The Flood Stories Project

Others used blocks to process their event: one parent told Superle how their kid had re-enacted the building of a floodproof wall to keep out the water.

Children also built their own positive narratives out of their experiences. Just across the Vedder Canal from Sumas Prairie in rural western Chilliwack, children watched their families, parents, and communities rally to help out. Those kids, Superle said, seemed to focus on the community effort to solve problems collaboratively.

The kids might have experienced worry, concern, and stress. But she said a common rallying cry seems to have stuck with the kids:

“We can do this.”

The students’ projects also include pieces from teenagers and older children. Those include a painting of a mouse keeping dry on a pumpkin amid the floodwaters on Matsqui Prairie.

The concept came directly from real-life, when Jessica’s mother looked out the front window at the family yard-turned-lake. Pumpkins were floating all across the yard and on one was a small mouse.

“My mother pointed it out, and through tears, started to laugh hysterically. My sister and I joined her soon after and had the same reaction,” Boon wrote in an accompanying statement. “We found it so hilariously upsetting that the mouse was in the same situation as we were, trying to survive in a brand new environment.”

Awards in the Flood Stories Expressive Arts contests will be handed out Saturday at The Reach Gallery during a children’s celebration held in conjunction with Family Literacy Day and the opening of the Flood Stories exhibit.

You can find students' award-winning projects here. You can see them in person at The Reach. On Saturday, the gallery hosts an awards ceremony and children's celebration from 11am to 2pm with a story time, poetry activities, group art project, philosophy circle and more. The day also marks Family Literacy Day at the gallery with other groups also running activities.

Flood Stories: an expressive art contest of healing: "Writing as a way of healing"

By Emmaline Spencer, November 16, 2022

<http://ufvcascade.ca/flood-stories-an-expressive-art-contest-of-healing/>

In November of 2021, devastating floods overtook the Fraser Valley, leaving farms in ruins and many homeless. As the community works toward returning to normalcy and recovering from the damages, the Flood Stories project was started to help the people heal through a creative and tangible form.

One of the many impacted by the floods was Michelle Superle, associate professor at UFV, who was evacuated from her home at the beginning of the floods. Fortunately, she was able to return home with minimal damages to her own abode and immediately started volunteering at the Yarrow Food Hub. During her time there, she saw a real need for people to find ways to cope and process.

Superle explained that while volunteering and doing interviews for an article she wrote for edible Vancouver & Wine Country, she found people wanting to write about their experiences but not knowing how to start. "Many people would say to me, 'oh you know I've always wanted to write a book. I've always wanted to write such and such.' Then after a while I had this idea, that it might hold up and be helpful for them to write about this, because I had just read [UFV student] Lauryn Joly's term paper on expressive writing as a way of supporting resilience and mental health."

The Flood Stories Project

That was the very beginning of the long road of the Flood Stories project. From there, Superle started working with Joly to create a workshop to help the community express their experiences and hopefully find a sense of healing along the way.

According to Superle, the project shifted into creating “a public platform for more people to share how they were affected by the flooding.” The most recent addition to the project was an Expressive Art contest, which gave people of all ages a chance to work through their emotions through creative forms of writing, art, and other creative mediums, while providing them with an opportunity to have those passionate pieces shared with the public.

As the project began to come together, Superle had students come to her wanting to write and participate, though they weren’t directly impacted by the floods. This spawned the second prompt in the contest: express gratitude for local farmers.

“It’s been hugely, hugely challenging and I don’t know if that’s mostly because this kind of work is very new to me. I’m trained as a literary scholar and an English professor, and I’m pretty good at those things. But this kind of research, this level of project development and coordination, is absolutely new to me,” Superle explained.

“I’ve had quite a large team of students working with me, which has been wonderful, but all of those things are quite new to me and to be doing them all at once and in such a high stakes situation. I’m always mindful that I want to be respectful of people’s experiences and time, and making sure that we’re only adding beneficial aspects to their lives and experiences, and not causing any kind of harm,” said Superle when discussing what it’s been like bringing such a large project together during a sensitive time.

The final day for submissions was Nov. 4. The competition has multiple categories including written, visual art, auditory, and kinesthetic. Within the categories are age

groups such as students in grades K-7, students in grades 8-12, and a section for the UFV community.

“I hope to keep offering the ‘writing to heal workshop.’ I would also like to pass along the resource booklets and the method [for expressive writing] to train students, folks, advocates, and facilitators at the Peer Wellness Center,” said Superle, looking back on the work done so far.

Writing and how it can be foundational as a way of healing: Journaling workshops that help process the loss of the floods

By Anisa Quintyne, March 16, 2022

<http://ufvcascade.ca/writing-and-how-it-can-be-foundational-as-a-way-of-healing/>

The “Writing as a Way of Healing” workshop was created after the floods that wreaked havoc over the Fraser Valley in November 2021. The goal of these workshops is to help those who are impacted by the flooding overcome this challenging experience through a series of reflections, brainstorming, and sustainability.

Michelle Superle, a passionate children’s literature specialist and writer, has taken the lead on this project. As a Yarrow resident, Superle had to evacuate her home when the floods came, and immediately started looking for ways to help her community.

“Right after we returned home from evacuation during the flood, I started volunteering with the Yarrow Food Hub,” Superle says, sharing what inspired the creation of the workshops. “For a while I was there twice a day. It was very intense hearing firsthand about the farmers’ experiences, and I immediately started wondering how I could help by using my own unique skills and interests — beyond all the baking and cooking I was doing!”

The Flood Stories Project

“So many people were volunteering by doing heavy manual labour, but I’m unable to do that. I couldn’t think of what I could do beyond writing about the farmers’ experiences.”

While Superle was conducting interviews with the impacted farmers about the Yarrow Food Hub in an interview she was writing for edible Vancouver magazine, she began to form connections with the stories that were being told.

“Many farmers started talking about the family treasures they’d lost — including diaries, letters, journals,” said Superle. “It was an exceptionally heartbreaking aspect of the losses, and that’s a pretty big deal considering that for many people the losses included their entire home!

“As I chatted with farmers about this aspect of loss, the conversation would often meander off in the direction of how much comfort writing can bring — especially journaling.”

From hearing farmers’ stories of loss and how writing became an integral part of their healing, Superle realized what her contribution to the recovery efforts could be.

“Coincidentally, I’d just been reading about expressive writing techniques and their benefits; this was inspired by a research essay that one of my students, Lauryn Joly,

ad recently submitted. I asked a couple of farmers if they’d like to attend a writing workshop aimed at helping them journal about their experience in the flooding as a way to help process the experiences. Everyone said yes.”

Through UFV’s Work Study program, Superle eventually hired Joly to collaborate with her to develop and co-facilitate the workshop.

Simply venting frustrations into a journal can actually make writers feel worse as they wallow in their misfortunes. As an alternative to venting their miseries away with a pen and paper, a deeper understanding of their emotions can be achieved if the writer describes their intense emotions through brainstorming and illustrating their experiences.

This type of journaling functions as a balance, an equal measure of stability to ground oneself in reality while reflecting on the trauma endured through this passage of life. Otherwise known as “narrative therapy,” this is what the workshop aims to do: provide a comfortable healing experience through journaling for all those involved.

“Once I write about an experience, there comes a point where I find a sense of peace with it,” said Superle, who has used writing as a way of emotional healing to process circumstances throughout the course of her life. “Usually this comes when I arrive at some new understanding of or perspective on the issue, and that’s what the experts in expressive writing suggest is so empowering for people — so healing.”

Superle explains, “It’s the process of reinterpreting our experiences on our own terms, as our own stories.”

Superle started teaching children’s literature and writing courses at UFV in 2005, and then returned as a full-time, permanent faculty member in 2012 after she completed her PhD.

“This is literally my dream job,” Superle says with enthusiasm. “Every day I pinch myself to remind myself that I am living the dream.”

Flood Stories project provides writing-for-healing opportunities

By Anne Russell on October 24, 2022

<https://blogs.ufv.ca/blog/2022/10/flood-stories-project-provides-writing-for-healing-opportunities/>

People in the Fraser Valley and much of B.C. endured an extremely stressful collective experience last November and early December when multiple floods occurred.

Now a special project based at the University of the Fraser Valley is inviting those affected to share their experiences.

The Flood Stories expressive arts contest offers an outlet for people to use creativity for processing stressful experiences that arose last year in the Fraser Valley and much of B.C. when multiple floods occurred. The contest is open to school children from Abbotsford and Chilliwack in grades K through 12 (including private schools and homeschoolers), as well as UFV students, staff, faculty, and alumni.

Led by Dr. Michelle Superle, an English professor and research associate with the UFV Food and Agriculture Institute, the Flood Stories project engages farmers in the Fraser Valley who were affected by the November 2021 extreme flooding events, inviting them and their families to share their experiences in spoken, written, and artistic format. The project uses a narrative approach (developed in consultation with narrative therapy expert Dr. Stephen Madigan) to better understand how Abbotsford farmers have been affected by floods and what they need to begin thriving again.

“We recognize that the flood was a very unusual and traumatic experience for many people, both those whose properties flooded and those who observed their fellow citizens undergoing extreme stress,” notes Superle. “We think it’s important, as the first anniversary of the flood approaches, to tell those stories, record them for

The Flood Stories Project

posterity, and learn from them. Telling their story can also be therapeutic for those affected.”

The Expressive Arts Contest is the final component of the Flood Stories project. Submissions are due by November 4, and participants will have their artistic projects displayed online and on campus at UFV, as well as other locations throughout Abbotsford. Entries will be assessed by a jury composed of UFV arts students, with exciting prizes for winners.

Flood Stories Project Submission Guidelines:

EMAIL your submissions to floodstoriesproject@gmail.com

SUBMIT up to three pieces per contributor

SPECIFY which category your submission falls under

SEND your submission in the appropriate format:

CATEGORIES

Written pieces: send Word or PDF files formatted in Times New Roman 12-point, double-spaced, with standard margins, and free of spelling mistakes and obvious grammar issues.

* Short stories and creative essays: maximum length is 1,500 words.

Visual art: send high-quality, high-resolution photos or scans; include dimensions and medium.

The Flood Stories Project

Auditory (for example, musical composition) and kinesthetic (for example, choreography, dance): record your performance and submit a link.

REMEMBER! Attach a signed release form with your submission. Only submissions that include the signed release form will be included in the Flood Stories project. Find forms here.

Send your submissions to floodstoriesproject@gmail.com

Extended Deadline to submit: November 4, 2022

Winners announced: November 14, 2022

Questions? Ask us at floodstoriesproject@gmail.com Prizes:

UFV Community: \$200 gift card for Restaurant 62

Grade K-7 students: VIP family membership to the EcoDairy + \$25 gift card to Castle Fun Park

Grade 8-12 students: \$75 gift certificate to the Abbotsford Farmers' Market + \$25 gift certificate to The Bookman OR a movie theatre of the student's choice

*One prize will be awarded per category (written, visual, auditory/kinesthetic/etc) for each group.

Flood Stories winners' submissions 'incredibly powerful'

By Anne Russell on November 24, 2022

<https://blogs.ufv.ca/blog/2022/11/flood-stories-winners-submissions-incredibly-powerful/>

A year after flooding devastated the Fraser Valley, the collective experience has been captured in a series of artistic expressions garnered through a contest and an open invitation for those affected to share their stories. The results are in, and they're remarkable, according to Dr. Michelle Superle, who organized the Flood Stories project.

“The inspiration for the Flood Stories project was two-fold: to create space for everyone who wanted to share their flood story to tell it in their own way, and to demonstrate respect for the local farmers who work so hard to feed us,” says Superle, an English professor and research associate with the UFV Food and Agriculture Institute. “The ultimate purpose of both parts of this project was to support healing. Responses to the project have exceeded our expectations: the stories and art people have shared are incredibly powerful. They demonstrate the best, most beautiful facets of humanity — hope, collaboration, and persistence. We are grateful to have met and worked with so many wonderful members of the community on this project. Thank you for trusting us with your stories.”

The Flood Stories project engaged farmers in the Fraser Valley who were affected by the November 2021 extreme flooding events, inviting them and their families to share their experiences in spoken, written, and artistic format. The project used a narrative approach to better understand how Abbotsford farmers have been affected by floods and what they need to begin thriving again.

In addition, a contest was held school children from Abbotsford and Chilliwack in grades K through 12, as well as UFV students, staff, faculty, and alumni.

“We recognize that the flood was a very unusual and traumatic experience for many people, both those whose properties flooded and those who observed their fellow citizens undergoing extreme stress,” notes Superle. “We thought it was important, as

the first anniversary of the flood approached, to tell those stories, record them for posterity, and learn from them. Telling their story can also be therapeutic for those affected.”

UFV Bachelor of Arts student Sydney Marchand worked on the Flood Stories project as a student assistant.

“What started out as a practicum course quickly turned into a student research position that has been an incredible opportunity to get out into the community, support farmers, and provide an outlet for people to process a traumatic event in an expressive and creative way,” says Marchand. “It has been an honour to offer people an alternative way to express their emotions and encourage them along the healing journey.”

The team members who judged the submissions and selected winners were impressed with what they received.

“We were overwhelmed by the number and quality of submissions we received, and it was very difficult for our team to narrow down the winners,” noted a team representative. “We hope this project will act as a kind of capstone for the November 2021 floods, but also serve as a reminder of the resilience and strength that our community has.”

The Flood Stories submissions can be viewed [here](#).

Categories and winners

1st place written category: Sarah Brown

1st place visual art category: Brianna Plett

1st place photography category: Cobi Timmermans

2nd place written category: Sha Scholtens

2nd place visual art category: Victoria (Vivi) Vergara

2nd place photography category: Adam Magalhaes

The Flood Stories Project

3rd place written category: Emili Kaplin

3rd place visual art category: Jenna Cowie-Randle

3rd place photography category: Jennifer Martel

Grades K-7

1st place written category: Clara Fairbairn

1st place visual art category: Barrowtown Elementary

1st place “other” category: Greendale Elementary Division 4 & 5

2nd place written category: Greendale Elementary, class submission Division 8

2nd place visual art category: Greendale Elementary, Ms. Durflinger’s class

2nd place “other” category: Greendale Elementary, Division 7

3rd place written category: Audrey Kaszonyi

3rd place visual art category: Susan White’s Grade 2/3 class, honorable mention to Bhavdeep Malhi

3rd place “other” category: Greendale Elementary, Division 1

Grades 8-12

1st place visual art category: Jessica Boon

2nd place visual art category: Julia Janzen

Sharing stories to help with post-flood trauma

By Anne Russell on March 6, 2022

<https://blogs.ufv.ca/blog/2022/03/sharing-stories-to-help-with-post-flood-trauma/>

Sharing stories can be a way of healing, and a creative project offered by the UFV Food and Agriculture Institute is giving people affected by the devastating floods of November 2021 a way to share their experiences.

Dr. Michelle Superle, who is an assistant professor of English at UFV, a published writer, a research associate of the UFV Food and Agriculture Institute, and a concerned member of the Yarrow community, is leading the effort, along with Dr. Robert Newell, associate director of the FAI.

“We recognize that the floods were a life-changing and very traumatic experience for many farmers and other affected people,” Superle notes. “As they work towards recovering and rebuilding, some may find it therapeutic to revisit their experience by writing about it and reflecting on it.”

UFV is offering free Writing as a Way of Healing workshops to help those wanting to write about their experiences. The simple journaling techniques that Superle will teach in the workshops are accessible for everyone (no prior writing experience necessary!), and extensive research demonstrates that they are highly effective for helping survivors working through trauma to improve their mental and physical health.

Dates

Yarrow:

Wednesday, March 23, 7-8 pm, Yarrow Community Hall

Saturday, March 26, 3-4 pm, Yarrow Community Hall

UFV Abby campus:

Monday, March 28, 4:15-5:15 pm, Room A203B

Thursday, March 31, 3:15-4:15 pm, Room A203B

Custom and/or Zoom sessions will be arranged for groups that submit a request—just ask!

Superle and the UFV Food and Agriculture Centre can also help support farmers' recovery by providing help with writing services such as grant applications and impact statements, opportunities to be interviewed about your experiences, and UFV-funded student placements.

Free writing services

- Blog posts
- Grant applications
- Impact/victim statements. And more! Just ask!

Opportunities for farmers to share their “flood stories” through interviews with Dr. Superle and her research team

- Choose to share anonymously or with your name
- Choose to share in interview, written, and/or artistic format
- Choose to share privately (i.e., with Dr. Superle's research team only)
- Choose to share publicly (i.e., on the UFV FAI website, in a report to the BC Ministry of Agriculture, etc)

Ongoing support through UFV-funded student placements

- Practicum/co-op placements, Work Study positions, grant-funded research or support positions, etc)
- Get in touch to explain your needs, and we'll do our best to find the right student to support you!

English professor provides writing as healing for farmers

By Gerald Narciso

https://issuu.com/goufv/docs/ufv_skookummagazine2022_lowrez-issu

The car was packed and ready to go.

Dr. Michelle Superle and her husband knew a text that would instruct them to evacuate their home in Yarrow was coming anytime. The torrential downpour that happened just a few days earlier resulted in widely publicized flooding that started in the Sumas Prairie in Abbotsford and now had slowly crept its way into Chilliwack's backyard.

When the couple finally got the notification to evacuate, they loaded their daughter, aging pets, and a couple of suitcases into the car. Leaving felt like they were in a movie as they took in surroundings full of emergency vehicles, flooded roads, cars towing trailers with livestock, and abandoned farmland.

“Leaving Yarrow was absolutely surreal, it looked like a different world,” says Superle, an associate professor in the UFV English department.

Superle's home was undamaged when the family returned two days later. She immediately began volunteering at the Yarrow Food Hub, which assists farmers and residents who were displaced because of the floods.

“While I was at the food hub, I heard farmers talk about their experiences of being evacuated, being out of their homes, and the kinds of things that were happening on their property,” says Superle, who is also a research associate at the UFV Food and Agriculture Institute.

The Flood Stories Project

With the farmers' livelihood literally stripped from them overnight, combined with the uncertainty around their future and the ongoing stresses of the pandemic, Superle grew concerned for the farming community's well-being. She wondered whether writing could help as a form of expression and healing.

That question was answered a few weeks later when she came across a student research essay that was written by Lauryn Joly, a first-year English student at UFV, on how expressive writing a narrative therapy can be very powerful ways of processing experiences. The essay was written before the floods, but Superle immediately saw the parallels.

As a result, Superle launched the Flood Stories, a multi-faceted project that aims to support healing for farmers in her community. One element of the project is interviewing and collecting farmers' first-person narratives of the flood to use for publication; Superle hopes these stories will, "raise awareness about the severity of the situation and the importance of our farmers."

Another element of the Flood Stories project is the Writing as a Way of Healing workshop, which teaches simple journaling techniques to any farmer or Fraser Valley resident who needs a creative outlet to deal with trauma associated with the flooding. "When I was running the idea of a writing for healing workshop by the farmers, I was surprised by the interest," Superle says. "With everything going on, I thought it might be too much — or that nobody would have the time. But people have been very enthusiastic about it."

This article originally appeared in the 2022 edition of UFV's Skookum magazine.

Food and Agriculture Institute: The Flood Stories

<https://www.ufv.ca/food-agriculture-institute/the-research/agricultural-land/the-flood-stories/>

Led by Dr. Michelle Superle, the Flood Stories project engages farmers in the Fraser Valley who were affected by the November 2021 extreme flooding events, inviting them and their families to share their experiences in spoken, written, and artistic format. The project uses a narrative approach (developed in consultation with narrative therapy expert, Dr. Stephen Madigan) to better understand how Abbotsford farmers have been affected by floods and what they need to begin thriving again.

Flood Stories Expressive Arts contest - WINNERS!

University of the Fraser Valley

1st place written category: Sarah Brown's creative essay on the Chilliwack River flood 2021

1st place visual art category: Brianna Plett, sculpture, Our Lost Paper Memories (artist statement)

1st place photography category: Cobi Timmermans, Lake Bottom series (special mention photo)

2nd place written category: Sha Scholtens' poem titled Waterlogged

2nd place visual art category: Victoria (Vivi) Vergara, painting, Hope for Farmers

2nd place photography category: Adam Magalhaes, photograph

The Flood Stories Project

3rd place written category: Emili Kaplin's short fiction titled I Drowned in the Flood (artist statement)

3rd place visual art category: Jenna Cowie-Randle, graphite, ink and pencil crayons

3rd place photography category: Jennifer Martel, photograph, Flood and Fire

Kindergarten - Grade 7

1st place written category: Clara Fairbairn's poem titled Sandbags

1st place visual art category: Barrowtown Elementary collaboration project, mosaic pathway

1st place "other" category: Greendale Elementary Division 4 & 5 mapping project

2nd place written category: Greendale Elementary, class submission Division 8, written scripts of flood stories (unable to post accessible link)

2nd place visual art category: Greendale Elementary, Ms. Durflinger's class, Helping Hands

2nd place "other" category: Greendale Elementary, Division 7, creative video submission, (unable to post accessible link)

The Flood Stories Project

3rd place written category: Audrey Kaszonyi, creative writing, (unable to post accessible link)

3rd place visual art category: Susan White's Grade 2/3 class, honorable mention to Bhavdeep Malhi

3rd place "other" category: Greendale Elementary, Division 1, photo essay
Grades 8 - 12

1st place written category: (no submissions)

1st place visual art category: Jessica Boon, Hysterics (artist statement)

2nd place written category: (no submissions)

2nd place visual art category: Julia Janzen, painting

3rd place written category: (no submissions)

3rd place visual art category: Finn Toews

The results from this work will inform recommendations, which government (at different levels), community associations, non-profits, and academic institutions can adopt to better support Abbotsford farmers. The project also aims to highlight and raise public awareness around the importance of local farmers, the challenges they experience, and the supports that would help them thrive. The specific activities and objectives for this project are below.

The Flood Stories Project

Flood Stories Blog Posts

Read about recent events and activities from the Flood Stories team below through the link to their blog post page.

Project Objectives

To provide a platform for Abbotsford farmers affected by the flooding to share their experiences

To enrich public understanding of farmers' experiences of the natural disaster and its consequences

To celebrate Abbotsford farmers' contributions to local food security

To help support farmers as they strive to make their homes and farms viable again

To engage UFV community members and Abbotsford school children in artistic celebrations of Abbotsford farmers' contributions to food security

To provide opportunities for processing experiences of this natural disaster

Project Activities

Invitations to Abbotsford farmers affected by the flood to share their stories of the experience: Farmers and their families will be invited to describe their experiences of the flood and the impacts of its aftermath through verbal interviews, written responses, and/or artistic responses. Farmers and family members will have the choice as to whether they would like their stories to be shared publicly (e.g., webpage,

The Flood Stories Project

reports, articles, blog posts). Those who wish to share their stories publicly will have the option of being anonymous or identified.

"Writing as a Way of Healing" workshops: Farmers, members of the UFV community, and other community groups affected by the flooding will be invited to attend free workshops to help them work through and make sense of their flood experiences. The workshops will utilize a narrative method designed to cultivate resilience in people who have experienced traumatic situations. The method does not require participants to be writers; the technique is basically journaling.

Submissions of artistic projects: Members of the UFV community and Abbotsford school children (K-12) will be invited to submit artistic projects related to flooding. These projects will be shaped around the questions - what was your experience of the flood, and what do you appreciate about your local farmers? Submissions can be developed using a variety of medium, including (but not limited to) written (poetry, fiction), visual (sculpture, drawing, film, photography), textile/tactile (fashion design, felted figures, knitting), auditory (musical composition), kinesthetic (choreography, dance), taste (recipes), and digital (multimedia).

Sharing the Stories: Stories and images of artistic submissions will be shared on the project webpage. In addition, in collaboration with various community groups, these works will also be displayed on UFV campuses, in local galleries, and in Abbotsford municipal spaces (i.e., community centres, libraries, schools, etc). The project will produce articles, blog posts, and presentations for disseminating with a wide variety of audiences, including scholarly, government, non-profit, and community groups.

Gala celebration of Abbotsford farmers: Abbotsford farmers, school children, and members of the UFV community will be invited to attend a gala event (fall 2022) at the UFV Abbotsford campus. The gala will showcase excerpts of flood stories from farmers who wish to share their work publicly in written, visual, and verbal formats, as well as artistic submissions.

Connect with Dr. Superle to schedule an interview and/or workshop, get more information about the artistic projects and/or gala, and discuss ways to collaborate.

The Flood Stories Team Takes on Community Events: Building resilience within the Fraser Valley farming community through creative expression

By Sydney Marchand

<https://www.ufv.ca/food-agriculture-institute/the-research/agricultural-land/the-flood-stories/blog-posts/canada-day-blog-post/#d.en.1032130>

The team members behind The Flood Stories Project were delighted to take part in Abbotsford's Canada Day Celebration at Exhibition Park. While the team spoke with many farmers and families who were affected by the floods in November 2021, the real hit of the day was the art station which encouraged children to either explore their flood experiences through creative expression, or express images of appreciation for the farmers who work hard to put food on our plates.

While the main focus of the project thus far has encouraged affected farmers to discuss their flood stories through verbal and/or written interviews and workshops, there are many sources that highlight the positive link between artistic expression and one's ability to process emotions. This event allowed the team to outline our mission to a large group of people in a short period of time, and it was nothing less than a stellar success.

Working a full day in the summer heat, and with the consent of parents and guardians, the team spoke with hundreds of children about their personal experiences in November and invited participants to consider the lasting impact the floods have had on farmlands. Many children took time to consider where the fruits, vegetables, and livestock we depend on come from and expressed a new or heightened appreciation for the farmers in the Fraser Valley.

Their collected artworks express themes of loss, overwhelm, and anxiety, featuring page after page covered with swathes of blue water, along with upside down houses, sad faces, and flooded fields. Despite the terror of the event, though, it was fascinating to see how these children proudly showcased their images with such hope and optimism for the future. Many of them explained, in simple terms, that while the flood events were frightening, their families expressed unconditional support and resilience. While the images of flooding barns and heavy rainfalls were evidently prominent in their memories, the ways that each of them explained their experiences were compelling for their strength and bravery.

Children who did not personally experience loss contributed by creating an abundance of images of appreciation for farmers and the farming community. Many highlighted the theme of “No Farmers, No Food” and explained that without farmers some of their favourite foods, like blueberries, would be difficult to find.

The flood events may no longer be top of mind for the public, since the media has largely abandoned the topic, for farmers the trauma the floods is lasting. Worse still, many of the affected farmers, families, and surrounding communities are just now beginning to experience the lasting consequences the disaster has created for the food system as summer harvests begin. Many are experiencing a decrease in crop production due to the shift in soil chemistry. Others simply do not have access to resources to rebuild their livelihoods.

It is imperative to continue showing our support and appreciation for the farmers who continue to work tirelessly for the community. Events like this one allow us to continue to spread our message while broadening our scope of participants.

Progressive Agriculture Safety Day Blog Post: Harvesting Connections

By Jinnie Saran

<https://www.ufv.ca/food-agriculture-institute/the-research/agricultural-land/the-flood-stories/blog-posts/progressive-agriculture-safety-day-blog-post/#d.en.1032136>

It may seem as if disability has nothing to do with farming, but disability and accessibility are actually part of every situation. That's why I said "Yes!" so eagerly when I was invited to staff the Disability Awareness station at the Progressive Agriculture Safety Day delivered by AgSafe BC and the UFV Food and Agriculture Institute for kids on August 31st, 2022, in Agassiz. Children from the area were invited to this free event to learn about physical and mental health on the farm. The day was divided into workshops, wiggle breaks, games, and snacks, with children rotating through six stations that each provided a workshop on a different topic.

Safety Day was tons of fun, plus we all learned a lot—grownups too! Alongside my Disability Awareness station, there were a variety of stations for the children to circulate through, including tractor safety and hearing safety. I was happy to sit in on several workshops and witness the impact they had on the children who attended—especially the ones that went beyond simply focusing on physical safety on the farm. For example, Kylie Bartel, a registered clinical counsellor who uses animal therapy techniques, ran a station that allowed children to talk about mental health and its complexities while interacting with kittens and focusing on the animals' physical and emotional needs. This innovative approach allowed many children to feel comfortable sharing different ways they cope with stress. They also asked Kylie plenty of questions about the topic and associated wellness techniques.

As well as her workshop, Kylie also led everyone through a fun—and very challenging!—game that let us burn off energy while subtly learning about boundaries and self-care. Pairing these heavy topics and lessons with hands-on physical activities assisted the children in grasping these concepts in an engaging manner, at a developmentally appropriate level.

At my station, my Disability Awareness workshop covered basic concepts such as preventing the dangers that can cause one to become disabled on a farm or a ranch. Each year in North America, hundreds of children die and thousands more are injured on farms where they live, work, and play. Prevention and awareness are important pieces of the safety puzzle.

But I had more to share. When I started researching and preparing for this workshop, I realized how important it is to make farming more accessible and inclusive to those with varying disabilities and all different types of bodies. That's because people of all shapes, sizes, and abilities are involved in agriculture—not just those who are fully able-bodied. When farming comes to mind, most of us probably think of it as an arduous process that requires intense manual labour and physical commitment. Though this is true, that assumption can lead people to the false conclusion that farming and agriculture are only for those who are fully able-bodied. In reality this couldn't be farther from the truth—especially because so many farmers incur injuries that cause disabilities!

That's why my workshop provided children with the chance to learn about different kinds of disabilities, such as being non-verbal, hard of hearing, a wheelchair user, and of course my own—blindness. With this awareness fresh in their minds, the children brainstormed ways to adapt farms and agricultural equipment to be made more inclusive. For instance, one safety resource about accessibility mentioned that a smoother pathway leading into the farm would make it more accessible for those with movement and mobility challenges. But since the children were already thinking about various disabilities, they made connections and determined that this adaptation would also benefit people who are blind.

In an equally exciting leap, the children also connected their ideas about disabilities in agriculture to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. By recognizing their rights and the rights of disabled children, they became even more invested in the importance of adaptations that could be brought to the farm to make it safer and more accessible for people with disabilities.

Similarly, I also made sure to point out how even someone who is blind can be a farmer. I shared an article from Modern Farmer about Rebecca Blaevoet, a blind woman who owns her very own farm in New Brunswick. She is involved in every aspect of running the farm, regardless of her blindness. Children listened to excerpts from this article, which described a real-life application of accessibility adaptations. For Rebecca, an adaptation as simple as putting bells on her livestock goes a long way towards ensuring she can safely manage her own farm.

At the end of the afternoon, Dr. Michelle Superle delivered a workshop that she'd developed as part of her Flood Stories project. Her station helped children appreciate farm safety and mental health in a way that was palpable to a young audience. Superle utilized diverse resources such as books, writing, and art to engage children and help facilitate their personal expression of thoughts and feelings.

Superle read aloud to the children from two picture books that subtly emphasize the importance of physical and emotional safety. She chose them for the ways they connect with the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child concepts that I had highlighted at my station. For example, *The New Baby Calf* by Barbara Reid, tells a story about farm life through an anthropomorphic lens, vividly demonstrating a child's right to be protected and kept safe.

Overall, Safety Day helped children learn about safety on the farm in relation to personal growth and self-care through interactive activities and group discussion. Throughout the span of one day, children learned about healthy relationships, their own healthy limitations, and empathizing with others around them who may have different needs and abilities than their own. Though in the most simplistic terms the day focused on farm safety, children departed with a wealth of knowledge and understanding that they can now apply not only on the farm but also in their local communities.

Go Play Outside invites UFV’s Flood Stories Project Team to Summer Pop Ups: Community events push for creative expression and farming appreciation

By Sydney Marchand

<https://www.ufv.ca/food-agriculture-institute/the-research/agricultural-land/the-flood-stories/blog-posts/go-play-outside-blog-post-/#d.en.1032132>

On Thursday, August 25 the Flood Stories Project was delighted to participate in Go Play Outside, a free summer pop up event offered by the City of Abbotsford’s Culture and Recreation department. The event occurred every Thursday from June 30 – August 24, offering the community a chance to connect with local artists and organizations from surrounding areas.

Though it was a hot summer day, the pop up, located at Mill Lake Park, was a complete success! Families were drawn in by the bright purple tents, craft tables, and outdoor equipment stretched across the park. The Go Play Outside setup invited children to venture from tent to tent, participating in each activity at their own pace.

This was perfect for the Flood Stories project because, as the pop up was located in such a calm environment, it provided the team with a chance to engage in genuine conversations with children and their families about what they experienced during the November 2021 flood events. Many of the conversations between the team members and participating families involved a reflection of the floods, the emotions that were brought on by the floods, and the importance of their stories. The safe space provided by the Go Play Outside event allowed participants to convey these moments of fear, hope, and obscurity in a creative and expressive manner.

As well as the artistic projects created, the Flood Stories tent also provided a space for children to participate in conversations with each other—an unexpected bonus of the event. Many compared stories of the “brown water” around their homes or the animals they saw trekking through the flooded fields.

Reflecting on the event, there's no doubt about it: the conversations and stories that accompanied the children's drawings were the highlight. The relaxed atmosphere allowed our team to connect with those in attendance and offer them the chance to express their flood stories in a way that validated their emotions.

Children are resilient beings, and community events like this one provide a space for them to be reminded of their strength and courage.

Hub of the Wheel: Yarrow's Food Hub Serves Slivers of Hope to Local Farmers

edible Vancouver & Wine Country, March/April 2022

Michelle Superle

“Do you need anything to eat? A sandwich? A cup of coffee?”

Victoria Kuit was startled by the offer when she slowed down to get a closer look at the roadside stand. Suddenly she recognized an elementary school friend she hadn't seen for years. “No,” she told her long-lost friend. “I'm fine... Why?”

“I'm giving meals to the farmers who've been flooded out and the volunteers sandbagging to save our community”, was the answer—referring to the November 2021 flooding in Abbotsford. As soon as Kuit heard this she knew she'd toss her hat in with this community caretaker. But she had no idea the casual exchange would reshape her life for the next several months.

“One day I was organizing a few crockpots to distribute,” she recalls, “that's how it started. The next I had semi-trucks full of donated food pulling into my driveway.”

That's because Kuit had invited her old friend to move the roadside stand into her backyard on November 19th. Within days the stand grew into the Yarrow Food Hub. “The need was there, so we served the need. That's just how I was raised. When people need help, you help.”

Kuit grew up in Yarrow, the small Chilliwack town famous for its community spirit. “I knew a lot of people in the area already,” says Kuit to explain how she became one of Yarrow’s key disaster relief organizers. “I’d been helping out with the school hot lunch program and organizing Secret Santa hampers for years. Before that it was Girl Guides!”

When the Food Hub got underway Yarrowites were still in recovery mode themselves. Many were coping with localized flooding in basements, on hobby farms, or from landslides down Vedder Mountain.

Bad as things were in Yarrow, the flood victims who’d lost their entire homes and livelihoods were on the Sumas Prairie in Abbotsford. While this postal code distinction matters to municipalities, it made no difference to Kuit. She helps everyone, 24/7.

“A road doesn’t confine me,” she says, referring to Boundary Road. Literally the border between the two cities, Abbotsford residents live on the west side of the road, Chilliwack residents on the east.

Adria Janzen knows this all too well. The dairy farm she runs with her husband and their teenage sons is on one side of Boundary, while her father-in-law’s chicken barns are on the other. Both were flooded on November 17th, 2021. With her husband helping his dad as much as possible across the street, and Adria milking some of their cows at a farm where they were temporarily located (their livestock were sheltering at eight different farms), she had no time for anything else.

“At first I didn’t think we needed help,” she says. “Other farmers had lost everything! But one day we needed milk. We’re dairy farmers, and we didn’t have milk! We didn’t even have time to grab fast food.”

That was the moment she realized her family *did* need help. When she stopped at the Food Hub to pick up milk, “Victoria kept stuffing my sons’ pockets full of treats! She knows how much teenage boys eat. It was such a relief because then they weren’t constantly bugging our evacuation hosts for food. They eat *everything*! It was so needed, at just the right moment. It was amazing.”

This cross-border capacity was key to providing the support required at the apex of need, particularly when the highway was closed and relief from Abbotsford had to be

provided by boat. Those on the far eastern side of the flood were last in line—but closest to Chilliwack. So relief came from Yarrow.

Members of the tight-knit community stepped up in droves. Brian Louwarse of Yarrow General Store (who's Janzen's brother-in-law) provided tools, animal feed, and countless pairs of rubber boots to those in need. Missy Drysdale and Deseree Klimson tirelessly worked Facebook with targeted requests for aid, sourcing boots and other necessary supplies.

Several Yarrow churches also coordinated relief, but many flood victims weren't comfortable accepting help from religious organizations; the Food Hub was a better fit for them. Because the Food Hub is a grassroots, volunteer-driven initiative without the restrictions governing municipal and institutional relief efforts, its support flows to any flood victims who need help—no matter where they live. And thanks to Kuit, support arrives fast, with no questions asked and no cumbersome paperwork.

Another difference between the Yarrow Food Hub and other support agencies is that the Hub provides any and *everything*—not just food. “Dehumidifiers, boots, gloves, safety gear, cleaning supplies, you name it,” explains Kuit. But food is where it all started.

As soon as Yarrow residents were back on their feet, hundreds began volunteering for the Food Hub. They provided a seemingly endless flow of crock-pots full of hot homemade chilli, stew, and soup. They baked countless batches of muffins, cookies, and buns. They donated oodles of gift cards, flats of bottled water, crates of crackers, tubs of hand warmers, bags of toques, and boxes of boots. Even the local Girl Guide unit pitched in by providing cheery handmade cards to boost morale.

With Kuit's guidance, volunteers deliver this aid wherever it's needed. The meals arrive with everything provided, right down to hot and cold drinks, napkins, and cutlery. For months the Food Hub has fed both flood victims and the volunteer crews helping them clean up the devastation of ruined buildings and toxic sludge left behind in their homes and on their farms. “Just text me,” she says. “Tell me how many in your crew and where to deliver. We'll get it to you.”

Kuit is famed for her superpower of remembering the precise needs of hundreds of community members served by the Hub. As though her mind is filled with spreadsheets, when she receives a donation of size 4 children's snow pants, a gas furnace, a twin bed frame, or a batch of Celiac-safe gluten-free muffins, it's re-homed

with precisely the right family in minutes. “That’s my training as an accountant,” she laughs. “I run my own small business, so I’m *very* detail oriented!”

“It was such a load off,” explains Adria Janzen as she describes the process of flood recovery on the family dairy farm. “I’m usually the one who cooks everything, but with all that running around there was no way I could have managed to get groceries and do the cooking. We couldn’t have gotten through without that support. And *we* had a functional kitchen! So many people didn’t. And they still don’t,” she laments.

But hot meals and food hampers were only the beginning. “Soon we realized needs were changing almost daily,” explains Kuit. “First it was hip waders. Then it was warm clothing and boots. More slow cookers on the weekends, when more people could volunteer. Now it’s dehumidifiers. Next week it will be something else.”

Despite all this tangible need, it didn’t take Kuit long to recognize that daily bread alone wasn’t the only thing that kept people kept coming back to the Food Hub. She quickly understood that those who’d been affected by the natural disaster—or simply witnessed their neighbours’ losses and hardships—also needed each other for emotional support.

Janzen confirms this. “It’s a great place to chat with the neighbours. Somewhere comfortable where we can all just sit and rest for a few minutes by the fire with a cup of coffee.”

Although harder to measure, this social support from the Food Hub is as important as the goods flowing in and out. The feeling of being supported and understood is crucial to resilience in the aftermath of a natural disaster. That’s what Kuit is serving up.

Those who began to trust, then rely on, the Food Hub come from all walks of life and face a huge array of challenges. Kuit helps with everything from temporary homes for evacuees, to corralling volunteer crews to clear toxic sludge from damaged buildings, providing clean water, and sourcing desperately needed animal feed. What unites everyone she helps is their appreciation of Kuit and their gratitude for the chance to get to know members of their community they’d never have encountered otherwise.

These are the slivers of hope that keep the flood survivors going.

“I’ve lived here for thirty years,” declares Wendy Lee, who visits the Hub often. “But I’d never met Victoria. I’d never even *seen* most of the people I’ve come to know

through the Food Hub. Now they're not just neighbours, they're friends. Victoria has given us so much—so much more than just food.”

Lee grew up in Chilliwack, where her parents worked for Fraser Valley Foods and Berryland Canning. She moved to Yarrow when she married her husband Dennis Penner, who was raised in the small town. For the past thirty years they've lived and raised their family in a rented home on a beloved local vegetable farm. The building was once part of the historic Totem Tobacco Company, a farm that closed in 1935, after the last flood on the Sumas Prairie. Her home has survived two floods, and to Lee's immense relief her landlords, Bruce and Joy Wisbey, are restoring the building.

The Wisbeys were hard hit by the flood. Their vegetable farm's wash station and storage facilities filled up with six feet of water. Restoring this infrastructure is slow and challenging but crucial for re-opening the farm.

“We've had specialized repairmen and electricians working on the refrigeration units for three weeks,” explains Bruce Wisbey. “We've lost several tractors and other agricultural vehicles. And we still don't know if we'll be able to restore the residential building where our temporary foreign workers live during the summer. If we can't, we'll have to invest in mobile housing.” Another expensive proposition—but without the labourers, they can't bring in the harvest.

Down the road at Ripples Winery, Lee's colleague Michelle Dick and her employer Caroline Mostertman understand these uncertainties. All three have found comfort and support at the Yarrow Food Hub.

“It's a different world out here in the aftermath,” says Dick, whose husband of 38 years passed away from brain cancer just a few months before the flood. “People who aren't at ground zero don't understand it.”

The three women have worked together for over twenty years. In 2015, Ripples became a sparkling destination where locals, tourists, and wedding parties came to bask in the luxurious ambience. Their website says it all:

“The Secret Garden is tucked in the beautiful gardens of Ripples Winery and New Wave Distilling. The ambience is tropical garden party meets elegance. The beautiful clear roof reception space is filled with large tropical trees and plants and draped with elegant chiffon with massive, dimmable crystal chandeliers that twinkle all night.

Water features add soft gurgles and the sent of jasmine and ginger lilies fill the night air.”

But now everything is gone, destroyed the flood.

Mostertman and her husband have owned and operated the property for forty years, stewarding their farm from earthy beginnings as a hog operation. In fact, Mostertman was once president of the B. C. Hog Farming Association.

When the B. C. hog industry collapsed the Mostertmans knew they had to pivot. But with only twenty acres, it was difficult to make a living. It was time to get creative.

One solution was producing tropical water plants. “We got into the nursery business with Woodbridge Ponds because it was much more stable and lucrative than pork,” she explains.

Michelle Dick worked with those plants daily for decades. Some of them are more than twenty years old, propagating annually from the original root stock. Crying as she describes process, Dick laments, “The root stock is gone. Those plants are gone forever.”

Another of the Mostermans’ strategies involved planting blueberries and grapes. Then the Fraser Valley became overabundant in blueberry farms, so they began making wine as a value-added venture. Their daughter Kelsey later expanded this side of the business into distilling, and now the spirits made from their 100% organic blueberries receive rave reviews from appreciative customers.

Sadly, the flood destroyed most of their inventory. “Our biggest challenge has been losing so much stock,” Mostertman explains. “Barrels just floated away. And everything with a cork had to be discarded because it could have been contaminated by the toxic floodwater. We were able to sanitize bottles with screwtops. We had some flood sales to clear out damaged inventory and bring in a bit of revenue.”

As challenging as these recovery efforts were, being forced to lay off beloved long-term employees like Lee and Dick has been devastating.

Fortunately, she knows the Food Hub is supporting them with relief. Lee, Dick, and Mostertman are all served by the Yarrow Food Hub—each in ways that meet their individual needs.

“At first I didn’t think we really needed the food Victoria was providing,” Mostertman admits, “but soon we realized it was a gamechanger.”

Once volunteer crews started arriving to help with demolition and restoration work, she realized there was no way to provide lunch. “I wanted to feed the people helping us, but we had no cooking facilities or refrigeration. There aren’t even any fast food places nearby. It was amazing to be provided with a crock pot and sandwiches for them every day.” Those lunches still arrive daily to keep the volunteer crews nourished.

“It really hit me just before Christmas,” says Mostertman. “We didn’t leave the farm for almost two months after the flood. If I’d had to go grocery shopping at Christmas time and seen everyone acting so normal, and bumped into people asking how we’re doing and wishing us merry Christmas...well, it would have been too much.”

Christmas may be a distant memory now, but at the Yarrow Food Hub the word “angel” is still bandied about with casual yet heartfelt sincerity—probably because the comfort and joy are still flowing.

This joyful atmosphere is one reason Mostertman only ventures beyond her farm to go to the Food Hub; the “real” world is just too much. The Hub is a safe place where everyone understands the severity of the situation.

“It’s not just about food,” says Kuit. “It’s about friendship.”

Ripples remains an active construction site, but thanks to dedicated volunteers, restoration is moving along more swiftly than on most farms. A team of volunteer specialists even repaired and reupholstered the beautiful antique furniture in the tasting room. “With so much help from friends and our community, we’ll be up and running for weddings this summer,” says Mostertman with relief.

Months have passed since the flood, and the natural disaster has trickled out of public consciousness with the receding waters. But for the region’s farmers, every single day brings new reminders of the event, along with new challenges. For these folks—the very people who provide so much of our local milk, berries, meat, eggs, and vegetables—it’s not over.

In fact, restoration work is just getting underway on most farms. With the help of huge volunteer crews, many farmers have been able to demolish damaged buildings and dispose of ruined equipment. Now it’s time to rebuild.

But that's an expensive undertaking, particularly when insurance payments aren't forthcoming (flood plain residents don't qualify for flood insurance), and government aid is slow and complex to access. Many farmers don't even qualify for this aid because their farm businesses grossed more last year than the stringent criteria allow.

Without the infrastructure of equipment and buildings to anchor their farm work, they can't farm. And without income from crops or products rolling in any time soon, they won't have the funds to restore the buildings or replace the equipment.

Fortunately, caring volunteers committed to local food and farmers are still giving everything they can in the form of time, money, food, and supplies.

Victoria Kuit remains the hub of this wheel that just keeps on turning—and churning out slivers of hope—because it has to.

“It's far from over,” she reminds everyone who crosses her path. “The water may be gone, but that's the only certainty right now. Nobody knows if the crops or soil will be viable in the Spring. Most of the farmers aren't even back in their homes. They still need food on the table. The need is great. People were so generous over the holidays, but I worry they've forgotten the need remains acute.”

When asked how people can help, her response is swift. “Send money. They need gift cards for gas, groceries, and building supplies. Or send e-transfers. Or call me to find out what the needs are this week. This is sink or swim. We need our farmers to stay afloat. Without farmers, there's no food.”

Michelle Superle loves to eat. If she could have three wishes, she'd use them all to make sure the farmers are alright.

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<https://www.facebook.com/rippleswinery>

*****MORE media coverage of Flood Stories project:**

<https://www.agassizharrisonobserver.com/local-news/progressive-agriculture-safety-day-on-tap/>

The Flood Stories Project

<https://globalnews.ca/video/8703608/sharing-stories-to-help-with-post-flood-trauma/>

<https://www.hopestandard.com/community/art-and-writing-invited-as-part-of-ufv-flood-stories-project/>

<https://canadatoday.news/bc/art-and-writing-invited-as-part-of-the-ufv-flood-stories-project-69415/>

<https://wjmouat.abbyschools.ca/news/news-nest-november-21-25>

<https://educationnewscanada.com/article/education/level/university/1/979138/after-the-flood-ufv-helped-launch-abbotsford-disaster-relief-fund.html>

<https://myemail.constantcontact.com/Latest-News-from-the-BC-Chicken-Marketing-Board.html?soid=1134236666181&aid=HmV8dUwl9UQ>

<https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-46-on-the-coast/clip/15948606-one-year-flood>

RESEARCH STORIES

Sydney Marchand

ARTS 380 – Writing Practicum

Michelle Superle

April 27, 2022

Blog Post

Heading: Supporting local means more now than it ever did

Alternate heading: We still need to talk about the Fraser Valley Floods

Since launching *The Flood Stories* project in January 2022, Michelle Superle's team of students have been actively seeking farmers who were affected by the November 2021 floods to hear their stories and express emotional support during these difficult times.

The severity of the floods caused many people to evacuate, be displaced or lose their homes, grieve the loss of animals or loved ones and rebuild their plots of land. These challenges that the farmers faced amidst the floods were highlighted throughout the media and splashed across headlines, but when the flooding dissipated, so did the community support for the farmers. This is what *The Flood Stories* project aims to build; a supportive resource for farmers to reach out to, discuss their stories, express their hardships and feel heard and cared for.

Many farms throughout the Fraser Valley have been passed down through generations and have become symbols of family values, community and passion. After speaking to some of the affected farmers, though, it is clear that these farms also symbolize a resiliency and strength. While the trauma of these floods will stay with the affected victims, many of them will continue to tirelessly work to clean up and rebuild their lands for months—if not years—to come.

This work that the farmers do, however, is not often supported by the surrounding communities as much as it should be. As consumers, there is a disconnect between the food on our plate and where that food came from. We take for granted the hard work that is put into growing and cultivating the livestock and produce that supports our communities and nourishes our bodies. When natural disasters wreck havoc on our farmlands, it not only affects the livelihoods of the farmers, but it affects the entire community around them. This is exactly what happened during the November 2021 floods and yet, these pillar members of our communities feel completely neglected.

Stefan Lambrecht, an agricultural consultant who works closely with fruit and vegetable farmers throughout BC, explains that it may take some blueberry farmers up to 12 years for their soils and crops to completely recover and start full production.

Most of the affected fruit and vegetable farmers will not be able to produce their typical volume of crops for 2023 as they will still be recovering and rebalancing the soil throughout the spring and summer months. Lambrecht explains, however, that blueberry farmers are unique from other agriculture farmers because their crops can take upwards of ten years to ramp up to full production.

“[The general public] just think that blueberry [crops] can be replaced and they’ll have more fruit in a year. But that’s clearly not the case [...] The amount of damage is not easy to comprehend just from seeing it on the news.”

Blueberry farmers in BC alone are capable of producing around 220 million pounds of berries per year and so when disasters like this happen, the production of BC grown produce is affected. But this goes beyond blueberry farmers.

Livestock farmers were also heavily affected by the floods and face similar challenges of land damage in grazing fields or in the integrity of their barns. The work that they do to provide resources for the rest of us, is equally as unappreciated as the fruit and vegetable farmers.

Nicole, a chicken farmer in Abbotsford explains that “[the damage from the floods] doesn’t go away just because the media decides to not talk about it anymore. It doesn’t go away.”

So, what can we do? We need to continue to talk about it. We need to support those who support us. Donate to local Red Cross and disaster service organizations who can financially support those who must now rebuild their livelihoods. Speak out about the integral work our farmers do. The vital work that farmers for our communities and economy is often overlooked and taken for granted, but we can change that.

Michelle Rooke

ARTS 380 – Writing Practicum

Michelle Superle

April 27, 2022

Recommendation Report

In November of 2021, 550mm of rain fell in the city of Abbotsford creating what looked like a massive lake in the Sumas prairies. This flood caused such great

devastation, where farming land was left infertile, livestock was killed, and homes were lost. The farmers and the many people residing in the flood zone continue to work hard to rebuild what has been lost and broken. Even though much of the initial attention to these floods and its victims has subsided the struggles remain. The stories told in this project highlight the very real and continuous hardships faced by our local flood victims.

The purpose of the following report is to bring awareness towards the victims the November Abbotsford Sumas floods, and to provide recommendations on how the city of Abbotsford can better serve this community. The flood stories project is an investigation into the experiences of those affected by the floods. Through interviews, stories were relayed on the evacuations from the floods and recovery efforts. The stories tell of the difficulties that are still ongoing and the type of help that would be beneficial to our farmers. A total of four interviews took place, telling the unique story of survival from the floods. The following section will provide a summary of each of the interviews followed by a discussion on the limitations of this study and ending with recommendations.

Results: The Flood Stories

Interview: Horticulture Consultant

An interview took place with a horticulture consultant who helps farmers with applying for the various flood initiatives. There are several programs available that berry farmers can apply to for assistance. However, there is a large problem with the lack of awareness of these programs, as well as the difficult application process. The consultant had visited approximately 80 fields to assess the damages from the floods. He noted that for many farmers with extensive damage, it may take up to 12 years to wait for their lost crops to grow back. In addition, the approximate estimate to replant is \$140,000 to replace one acre. The type of aide available include crop insurance which only covers the cost of plants. There is also the Agri Stability program that was born just after the floods, which covers items that are typically not insured. It is a confusing process and only a certain percentage of insured items will be covered. The losses are huge. From the consultant's experience with the farmers, they are still in shock and in the clean-up process without direction on how to move forward. Even if they know of special aide programs, they have no idea how to apply. The consultant mentioned most of government aid will be going to the dairy and chicken farmers with little hope of left-over funding for the blueberry farmers.

Additional problems mentioned were the rising cost of fuel and other expenses such as irrigation, fertilizer, plants, packaging etc. The consultant was struck by the resiliency of the farmers, they have been struck by the pandemic, floods, summer heat wave, and then freezing winter conditions. Surprisingly, the farmers continue to have huge smiles and are optimistic, despite all that has happened. The farmers are also very unified and concerned with each other's well-being. The consultant stated that the biggest request is awareness of the ongoing struggles that these farmers are facing. Initially the flood struggles were portrayed all over the media, however that has been quickly forgotten. It is important to have the public advocate for the farmers to lobby for funding from the government, which would be incredibly helpful. In addition, people can support the local farmers through buying local.

Interview: Chicken Farmer

This particular farmer never left their farms during the flooding even though they were under evacuation order, no one came to tell them to get off the farm. They could not leave their farm because of their animals. It was a very frustrating experience for them to deal with the blockades. The greatest challenge for these farmers is the cleanup, which is ongoing. The main priority has been the barns and ensuring the barns were properly cleaned after the birds were evacuated. The cleanup consists of washing the floors, feeding equipment, watering equipment, and disinfecting water lines. The cleanup has been overwhelming and continuous.

The main challenges have been getting supplies due to flood and non-flood related issues. The cost of everything has risen substantially, however the return has not. The farmers rely on other farmers for supplies, who also have been affected by the floods. As a result, there is a shortage of supplies and space to produce supplies. What these farmers need most is for things to go back to normal, with people back to work, so there is no more supply shortage and people can continue farming as per usual.

Interview: Dairy Farmer

The interviewee was the (self-described) wife of a dairy farmer. They never left their farm as their house never flooded. The house sat like an island, as the rest of their land completely flooded. They almost had to evacuate their cows but because of the formation of the island their cows were able to roam free. They had friends deliver supplies such as food and water by boat. They were lucky that their brand-new

cow barn was spared any damages. However, their once fertile land was left like a sandy beach, unable to yield further crops. This land was once used to grow the feed for their cows, and without these crops they are now forced to purchase which greatly increases the cost of production and yields incredible losses. The farmer was impressed with all the help they received from the community. However, they are in need of funding to repair all the damages to their land. They also have gained an unwanted lake on their property that will need to be drained at some point. This farmer stated what they need most is funding to help with the cost of repairs, and the government to implement secure strategies to prevent future floods.

Interview: Hobby Farmer

This interviewee used to have a chicken farm, but they are now hobby farmers. Her primary job is CEO of local screen door company. Her story is quite different than the others, where she is in a secure financial position, however her loss and trauma was from the memorabilia and sentimental items that she lost in the floods. Her house was flooded with seven feet of water. She lost almost her entire antique collection, and her whole main floor had to be gutted. They are still in limbo on whether they need to rebuild or renovate, either option very costly. They expect no help from the government as they turned down flood insurance which would have increased their \$1700 yearly bill to \$14,000. She doesn't know of anyone who bought the flood insurance policy. As a result, she will not qualify for any aide. She acknowledged her position of financial stability and stated that many are not in her position. The losses of the other home owners in the Sumas flats will be devastating leaving so many people in ruin.

She noted that the City of Abbotsford was foretold that a flood like this would happen. She read the report had been previously written, predicting this exact flood with very accurate costs of damage and what would be needed to prevent such a tragedy. She is saddened that this report was ignored and that it took an actual natural disaster to wake up the city. Another flood will happen and its important that people are aware and that the government takes action to protect its people from future catastrophe. The interviewee stated that what is needed most is protection, and funding for those who cannot afford to rebuild their lives from the aftermath of the floods. Furthermore, the application process for aide is quite complex and difficult, as a result many farmers would need assistance on how to properly apply for any aide initiatives that are available.

Limitations

The initial goal of this study was to conduct a minimum of ten interviews to gain a broader picture of the impact of the floods on our local farmers. There was a combination of factors that prevented reaching this goal. To begin with the process to receive approval from the ethics board took more time than anticipated. Had there been more time, more interviews could have been recruited. An additional and weightier factor is the difficulty in finding farmers who were willing to share their stories. This population is under a lot of stress and extremely busy even without the added burden of destroyed farms. It is understandable that adding another task to an already busy schedule is cumbersome and hence why the lack of participation. Unfortunately, due to the small number of interviews one cannot generalize the findings to the greater farming population. As a result, the following recommendations are based on a small number of suggestions from our interviewees and may not reflect the actual needs of the farming community at large.

Recommendations

After reviewing the findings from the interviews, the most common requests for help are monetary. There is a substantial need for funding to repair what is damaged, and to rebuild what is lost. The loss is not limited to farmers, but also hobby farmers and those living in the flood zone who are not farmers. An additional need is to provide help in making farmers aware of what programs are available and to guide them in how to properly apply for government aid. Another important theme was public awareness. The media may have stopped reporting on the devastation, however these farmers are still suffering the consequences of the floods and have a long road of recovery for some many years ahead. It is important that the public continues to advocate for help to our local farmers. Lastly, these floods come as no surprise to the city of Abbotsford as a report had been produced with very accurate estimations of the size of the flood and the financial costs and devastation of such a flood with strategies for prevention. Sadly, this report was ignored. It is of utmost importance that the city of Abbotsford works hard to prevent future floods. All those that live in the flood zone need protection. The floods are also incredibly costly to our city, tax payers and ultimately our farmers. As a result it is important to avoid future catastrophic flooding to our city.

Michelle Rooke

Arts 380

January 26, 2022

Professor: Michelle Superle

Journal Entry, Week 3

This week my goal for this class was to research narrative therapy and narrative ethnography (NE). I am starting to get a better understanding of these disciplines of writing, healing and communicative research. Martin Cortazzi (2001) writes on the importance of narrative analysis as an element of doing ethnography. She explains that narrative is how humans organize their understanding of the world, making sense of past experiences and sharing it with others. It is a process involving more than one person where constructing, interpreting experience and making meaning is interactive. Cortazzi (2001), states that there are four major reasons for doing narrative analysis. First, to share the *meaning of experiences*, through telling, a person provides their own interpretations and explanations of events. The second reason is *voice*, where the shared experience and key events of groups can be represented. Voice brings awareness to a group's situation, cause, tragedy, culture, beliefs and more. Providing public profiles to *human qualities* is the third reason for narrative research, which provides insight to important, yet unacknowledged personal and professional qualities. It provides a window into what an occupation is really like whether it be a stay-at-home mother or a neuro surgeon. The final reason is to acknowledge ethnographic research as a *story*. One must be keenly aware that the story is a narrative account of a journey, discovery and interpretation, that is communicated from the outsider to the insider. The story is used as an effective means to persuade the reader. I found Cortazzi's perspectives on narrative therapy to be helpful in understanding the purpose of narrative writing.

The next reading was a commentary on narrative ethnography as applied to communication research, written by H.L Goodall (2004). I found this commentary to be beautifully written and highlighted the importance of relying research to the broader non-academic population, through narrative ethnography. He defines narrative ethnography as "a cross-disciplinary communication project aimed at re-establishing the centrality of personal experience and identify in the social construction of knowledge (Goodall, 2004, p187)." Goodall describes NE as speaking the unspeakable through the telling of private and hidden dimensions of life

that involve trauma, stories of resiliency, disease and often shame. Goodall (2004) goes on to say how NE is an interplay between the work in our lives and our lives at work. The stories are not always just about the ugly, but also the beautiful parts of life. Stories of beauty and peace, human connectedness, hope, love, friendships, and community. EN is a form of communication that organizes how our worlds are perceived and felt, which can often be messy and irrational. The stories we tell should be useful, therefore not limited to language only understood among the high academics, but also, the lay person. Goodall (2004) writes “Our lived experiences and scholarly reflections about them are the work, and the creative expressions, of applied communication researchers. Our worth in the public world is unlikely to be measured by a sample size, or an argument about methods, or the tedious language of our in-group speech, but by the value of our stories in the lives of people who read and use them (p193).”

I came upon an interesting narrative ethnography study on the interview process of Muslim woman and their issues with infertility and reproduction (Hampshire et al., 2014). It brought about ethical considerations of self-disclosure and forming friendships that last beyond the interviews. In this study, self-disclosure helped to form connections and build rapport with the interviewees. There is a lot of conflicting advice when it comes to using self-disclosure and is often said to be avoided, especially among novices. This article suggests that it is not a matter of whether self-disclosure is appropriate, but how and how much is used. The interviewers were careful to only reflect perspectives and experiences that interviewees had already shared, rather than introducing new ones. Another ethical consideration was having biases towards the accounts that were used and quoted. Some interviews lasted much longer and stronger relationships were built. Therefore, the authors brought attention to the overrepresentation of accounts, through “favoritism” which should be avoided (Hampshire et al., 2014).

The last ethical consideration was on relationship boundaries, as friendships were formed through the interview process. The authors consider the consequences of the interviewer seeking connection for oneself. In this study one of the interviewers formed a close relationship with one of the informants. Both researcher and informant were pregnant which immediately formed a kindred bond as they exchanged experiences. The relationship evolved from researcher-informant to one of friendship and mutual support. This raises some ethical considerations when forming

relationships with our interviewees especially when dealing with trauma victims that are prone to be more vulnerable.

I was interested in reading some work by Dr. Stephen Madigan, as we are meeting with him on Monday, and I am a bit clueless as to what is narrative therapy. There is so many approaches to therapy and hopefully one day I will be well familiar with them all. From Madigan's Narrative Therapy book, I learned that narrative therapy is focused on relational, contextual and anti-individualist therapeutic understanding of persons, problems and relationships (Madigan, 2019, p4). To be able to study a self, one must be able to understand how what they are reading relates to one's concept of themselves. Narrative therapy moves away from categorizing and diagnosing individuals, towards an approach that uses rich story development to provide patients with understanding of themselves that take into account family, important relationships, and cultural beliefs. The interviews that take place in narrative therapy piece together the puzzle of an individual's life, bringing forth knowledge, abilities, memories and experience to explain, heal, improve troubled behaviours and pathology, increase self-worth, and confidence. Narrative therapy is the approach of using an individual's story often through interviews, to heal and restore. It is a therapy of ethics and appreciation.

Through my readings this week I learn of the importance and potential impact our work will have on our community and informants through providing a voice to our local farmers in telling their story. Story telling is a form of healing, along with bringing awareness to a larger group on the struggles and suffering of an individual or group of people. Through my readings this week, I grow in my excitement and eagerness to represent the farming community through story telling. I am also left acknowledging my ignorance in this field of study. There is so much for me learn on how to effectively engage in narrative ethnography and communicative research.

The self-directed reading for this week applies to learning outcome (LO) number two as I gain knowledge in this field of study of narrative ethnography. I also was able to learn about the personal ethical challenges (LO number 9) in participating in this internship. I believe it will be a challenge to know when to engage or refrain from self-disclosure when building rapport and connection with informants. I also found that I was able to reflect on personal development (LO number 6), as I learn about other methods of therapy, specifically storytelling. I become curious, wanting to learn more. How I can apply narrative therapy in future studies or in my work as I go on to hopefully one day be a skillful practitioner.

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February 25, 2022

The Flood Stories Project
Letter of Informed Consent

Purpose/Objectives of the Study

Drs. Michelle Superle and Robert Newell of the Food and Agriculture Institute at the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV) are inviting farmers and their family members affected by the November 2021 flood to participate in *The Flood Stories Project* by sharing their experiences of the flood.

We are interested in hearing your stories about how you were affected by the flood during the evacuation and repopulation of your farm. We would also like to learn about what kinds of support you would value as you strive to restore your farm to viable operation. The overall goals of this research project are to gain a better understanding of the impacts on farmers and supports needed to inform effective recovery strategies, as well as to increase public awareness and appreciation of the important work that Fraser Valley farmers do.

In addition to Superle and Newell, the research team consists of UFV students Gurvir Johal, Lauryn Joly, Sydney Marchand, and Michelle Rooke. The project also involves community collaborators Darnell Barkman (Yarrow Disaster Response liaison), Victoria Kuit (Yarrow Food Hub), Yves Trudel (United Way), and Dr. Stephen Madigan (Vancouver School of Narrative Therapy).

In this study, we will meet with farm families to listen to their stories. Those who do not wish to do an interview but would still like to participate have the option to write and/or create expressive art about their experiences. Families that wish to do so will have the option to make their stories public, either anonymously or with their names included. Stories will be prepared from the interview transcripts, and if you chose this option, they will be provided for you to review and revise before publishing.

Procedures involved in the Research

If you decide to participate in this study, you and your family will be invited to share your stories of your experiences during and after the flooding. Participants of all ages will have the opportunity to participate in one or more of the following activities: verbal interviews, written responses, and artistic responses. Interviews will be conducted with individuals or as a family group in person on your farm, at a location in Yarrow such as the Yarrow Food Hub or Community Hall, or via telephone or Zoom—according to your preference.

Verbal interviews will be recorded for the purposes of accurate transcription and will be collected using the audio recorder function on a laptop provided by the UFV Research Office or Zoom's audio recording feature. Written responses will involve participants providing responses on paper or in a Word document (according to your preference); a laptop computer from the UFV Research Office will be provided for those who choose the latter option. Artistic responses will involve participants using pencil crayons and paper to draw an image capturing their experiences in the flood using the prompt, "What was it like for you during/after the flood?"

Verbal interviews and written responses will be prompted with questions such as "When did you decide to evacuate your farm?", "What did you learn about yourself and/or your community during/after the flood?", "Which life experiences and values have served you well during the crisis?", and "What do you want people to understand about your experiences in the flood?" You are free to interpret and respond to the questions in any way you choose.

Interviews will be conducted by Dr. Superle and/or members of the research team. Interviews will take approximately 20 to 60 minutes per participant or group. All researchers involved in this project have undergone ethics training and full criminal background checks. In addition, all hold valid vaccine passports.

Potential Benefits

The benefits of this project include a greater understanding of the impacts to and needs of farmers affected by the flooding, and such information can be used to inform flood recovery strategies and disaster policy development. In addition, participants sharing their experiences of the flood will be able to spotlight the extent of the impacts and communicate this information to government agencies and the broader public.

The overall goal of this research project is to help increase public awareness and appreciation of the important work that Fraser Valley farmers do, as well as the challenges they face while recovering from the flood.

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts to Participants

Some participants may become upset by speaking, writing, and/or reflecting on their experiences of the flood. All participants will receive an information package containing a list of support options available to farmers affected by the flood, including access to counselling services. Participants will be encouraged to take breaks if they are feeling upset by research activities, and are welcome to stop participating in the activities at any point.

Confidentiality

All participants' privacy will be respected. Only members of our research team will see your responses. Interview transcripts and image files will be stored in UFV's password-protected myFiles storage system, where only UFV members of the research team will have access. Hardcopies of transcript data will not be produced, and hardcopies of responses and pictures will be returned to participants after digital copies are made (unless participants prefer the researchers shred and recycle these materials).

The Flood Stories Project

Participants will be given the option to share their stories publicly, either anonymously or with their name(s) included. These stories will be shared as excerpts rather than verbatim transcripts, but may contain identifying information, depending on the nature of the story. As noted above, participants will be given the opportunity to review the story before publishing (a one-month review period), and a member of the Flood Stories research team will confirm with you whether the story can be published or if there are requested changes. If you choose to make your responses public, then we will share your stories either anonymously or with your name included, depending on your preference.

Participation

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You can agree to participate and/or allow your child participate now, but then change your mind later and withdraw. If your child wishes to participate in the study, you must grant permission. Participants are welcome to contact Dr. Superle, the Principal Investigator (contact details below) to request that their data are withdrawn from the study. The only exception to this is when data have been analyzed, synthesized, and published in reports and articles. Participants who wish to withdraw from the study should indicate this by May 1, 2022, to avoid having the responses included in articles and reports. Participants who wish to have their stories removed from the project website are welcome to request this at any time, and their request will be granted. Participants who withdraw from the study will have their data deleted from UFV storage. If the participants' stories are published on the project website, these will be deleted immediately after the withdrawal request is made.

All participants will be entered in a draw to win the following prizes: \$250 gift cards to Restaurant 62 for adults/families, \$50 annual family memberships to EcoDairy for children 12/under, or a \$75 gift certificate to Abbotsford Farmers' Market for teens.

All participants will be invited to attend the Flood Stories Gala at the UFV Abbotsford campus in the Fall of 2022 (date TBD).

Study Results

The Flood Stories Project

Outcomes of the project will be documented in reports that will first be shared with the participants, and then one month later made public through the UFV Food and Agriculture Institute website. In addition, outcomes will be shared on a public project website (developed as webpages within the FAI site), along with images of the art collected by the researchers. The websites will present stories of participants who wish for their stories to be shared, and these will be prepared from interview/written data; participants will be provided with copies of the prepared stories before publishing. Participants will be given the opportunity to review the story before publishing (a one-month review period), and researchers will confirm with them if the story can be published or if there are requested changes.

Dissemination will also include articles prepared for magazines such as *Edible Vancouver*, as well as presentations delivered through academic conferences and community events. Furthermore, an exhibit of the narrative responses and images will be showcased on UFV campuses and throughout Abbotsford municipal and cultural centres in the autumn of 2022.

Questions and Concerns

If you have any questions about the study, please let us know by getting in touch with Dr. Michelle Superle via e-mail: michelle.superle@ufv.ca. If you have any concerns regarding your rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the Ethics Officer at 604-557-4011 or Research.Ethics@ufv.ca.

The ethics of this research project have been reviewed and approved by the UFV Human Research Ethics Board (HREB Protocol No: 101007).

Signature

By signing below, I agree to participate in this study, titled *The Flood Stories Project*. I have read the information presented in the letter of informed consent for the study being conducted by Superle and Newell at the University of the Fraser Valley. I have

The Flood Stories Project

had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive any additional details. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study prior to May 1, 2022 (i.e., before the results are prepared in reports and articles) and that confidentiality and/or anonymity of all results will be preserved.

- Please check this box to indicate that you consent to having the interview audio-recorded (if applicable). The researchers will ask participants if they consent to audio-recording at the beginning of interviews. If you do not wish to have the session recorded, you are still welcome to participate, and the researchers will take detailed notes instead of a recording.

Name (please print) _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Once signed, you will receive a copy of this consent form.

Verbal Interview

Introduction

The researcher will provide the participant with a Letter of Consent, and they will give an overview of the research project and summary of each aspect of the consent form. The researcher will then invite the participant to ask questions about the project and consent form before proceeding with the interview.

Interview Questions

Participants will have one of two options:

Option 1. Speak in a freeform manner in response to questions:

- First: Rapport building/value focusing prompt:
 - Tell me a bit about your family and how you got into farming.
- Next: Information seeking prompt:
 - Tell me about your experience of the flooding.
- Last: Resilience framing prompt:
 - What makes you the most proud of how you've dealt with and are handling the situation?

Option 2. Participate in a semi-structured interview in response to the questions:

- First: Rapport building/value focusing questions:
 - Tell me a bit about your family and how you got into farming.
 - What do you enjoy most about farming?
 - What does a typical day of farming look like?
 - What sort of challenges do you encounter in farming?
 - What helps you meet those challenges?
 - What are 3 words that describe your family values?
- Next: Information seeking questions:
 - When did you decide to evacuate your farm?

The Flood Stories Project

- What are 3 words to describe what you were thinking and/or feeling as you were leaving your farm?
 - Before the November 2021 flood, had you ever wondered about what would happen if the Sumas Prairie flooded again?
 - What thoughts and/or feelings arose as you were leaving your farm?
 - What was the greatest challenge you faced when you first returned to your farm?
 - What are the main challenges you're facing on the farm now?
 - What do you want people to understand about your experiences in the flood?
 - What kinds of support would help you overcome the current challenges on the farm?
- Last: Resilience framing questions:
 - Which life experiences and values have served you well during the crisis?
 - Who's part of your support system?
 - What have you learned about yourself throughout your experience of the flooding?
 - What makes you the most proud of how you've dealt with and are handling the situation?

Written Interview

Introduction

The researcher will provide the participant with a Letter of Consent and a form with the questions below. The form will either be provided in hardcopy paper format or digital Word document format (along with an iPad or laptop). The protocol is similar to the verbal interview, but provides the option of written responses.

Questions

Participants will have one of two options:

Option 1. Write in a freeform manner in response to questions:

- First: Rapport building/value focusing prompt:
 - Tell me a bit about your family and how you got into farming.
- Next: Information seeking prompt:
 - Tell me about your experience of the flooding.
- Last: Resilience framing prompt:
 - What makes you the most proud of how you've dealt with and are handling the situation?

Option 2. Write in a semi-structured interview in response to the questions:

- First: Rapport building/value focusing questions:
 - Tell me a bit about your family and how you got into farming.
 - What do you enjoy most about farming?
 - What does a typical day of farming look like?
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Artistic Responses

Introduction

The researcher will provide the participant or (in the case of participants under 18) their parents/guardians with a Letter of Consent. Participants will be given an iPad or paper and pencil crayons to complete the drawing activity.

Activity

Draw a picture or pictures that create an image of what was it like for you during and/or after the flood.

Lauryn Joly

Professor Michelle Superle

English 105

November 17, 2021

Writing as a Tool for Healing from Trauma

What is writing used for? Many might say that writing is solely used to communicate. Whether it is ideas, instructions, stories, or messages, writing is one of the most effective ways to communicate with one another. However, some people would argue that it is more commonly used for self-expression, such as writing lyrics, memoirs, or journaling. This expressive form of writing has been used as an effective addition to the treatment of individuals who have survived severe traumatic events. Through the narration of a traumatic event, the individuals learn to heal from it emotionally in many ways. Though many other techniques are used to treat individuals suffering from trauma, expressive writing can be used as a tool for healing by giving the individual power through narration of the event, validating their feelings

and actuality of the event, and providing additional support in communicating these feelings to others.

Through narrating ones' story, one claims power and authorship of the telling, regardless of how much control they had over the situation at the time of its occurrence. This authorship is crucial because "it is the stories people tell and hold about their lives that determine the meaning they give to their lives" (Madigan 33). Re-authoring stories gives meaning to the author that they can control, something they may not have had before. This feeling happens because "such writing transforms the writer from a victim into something more powerful: a narrator with the power to observe. In short, when we write to express and make sense, we reclaim some measure of agency" (Siegel-Acevedo 2). This observation from an objective perspective is powerful as it separates the emotion from the event. A participant in a research study by Levitt et al. (2021) exemplified this when they stated "It was good to be able to separate observation from evaluations...I am at a more neutral/less emotional state and can look at what happened more objectively and less skewed by snap judgements my brain tends to make" (8). Although it is beneficial to view the event objectively to gain perspective, these perspectives must be coupled with the understanding of the individual's perception of the event in relation to the context of the age and mental state of the individual to create a bridge between the developmental stages and other perspectives of the event, this creates a life story that deconstructs the trauma (Duchin and Wiseman 291). The trauma being constructed into part of a life story may help the survivor live with the trauma, rather than relive it. In addition to joining perspective and emotion, the act of narration "could unlock the unconscious, silenced parts of the self" (Lourens 1). This unveiling could reveal feelings and emotions not seen on the surface.

Another potential benefit to narrating ones' story is validation of emotions and actuality of the event. As Duchin and Wiseman discuss in their study of Holocaust survivors, they found that all of the survivors had a "need for recognition of the traumatic events that they underwent, as well as validating their stories" (287). They continue by sharing a quote from one of the participants that discussed how they felt as though they could have imagined the whole thing in their head, that it didn't happen or that it was as though they were dreaming, and only after putting pen to paper did the story become real to them (Duchin and Wiseman 287). This implies that there is a need for validation in order to begin the real healing, whether that validation is achieved through self-narration or validation from others. Through the unlocking

potential of narration, an opportunity to analyze feelings not previously considered, as stated by a participant of a study conducted by Levitt et al. (2021) “It forced me to confront my feelings over how my family feels about my sexuality...feelings that I didn’t know about for years” (9). Confronting these feelings is essential to move forward with the healing process and develop a deeper understanding of ones self.

Further benefits of expressive writing are they can provide additional support in communicating feelings associated with trauma and forming connections to others. Connection is crucial to the mental health of everyone, and traumatic experiences often make one feel alienated and misunderstood, making it hard to feel the much needed connectedness rooted in humanity. Communicating these feelings and experiences can help others better understand, a desire shared by many trauma survivors (Duchin and Wiseman 288). Not all things can be explained verbally, and often speaking experiences can make one feel more vulnerable. Writing gives survivors the opportunity to communicate their feelings without feeling exposed so blatantly.

This intimacy between people builds trust and a feeling of connectedness, to both the survivor and individual entrusted by the survivor. In addition to this, a study done by Pyle (2006) explored the positive impacts of survivors receiving letters from their counsellors between sessions, as one participant stated “The bond was there from the session but solidified by the letters” (25). This statement suggests not only could there be a benefit to the survivor from storytelling, but that writing received from the people entrusted by the survivor in response can also have a positive impact. The received writing shows understanding and care from the supporting people, as Pyle quoted another participant stating “The fact that they had taken the time to put words on paper directly about what we had spoke about was amazing to me” (24). The time and understanding described are significant to the bond of the two people, showing true care and effort, which may not have been seen or received otherwise. In fact, some survivors receive absolutely no support, or feel ignored by the people they try to confide in. A participant of Duchin and Wiseman’s study stated “I wanted to tell everyone what happened. But they did not want to listen. I was not encouraged. And I was ashamed of what happened. I was ashamed of myself. So I just decided to write” (288). In a way, the writing become the confidant when no one else would, bringing a sense of connectedness if not to someone, then to something.

Lastly, in addition to the feeling of connectedness to others, the expression and uncovering of feelings can lead to a deepened connection to oneself. As mentioned briefly above, writing has an unveiling potential. “In my experience, this process of autoethnography-of gazing outward and inward-helped me to access unconscious and silenced parts of myself” (Lourens 7). Finding unconscious emotions and learning the meaning of them can lead to a shift in perspective of the survivors’ feelings of their self, a change from viewing oneself from a victim to a survivor. Lourens also mentioned “as I dig deeper into my painful experiences to do with disability, I am increasingly finding compassion and empathy for myself” (2). This need for validation and compassion craved from others, can also be found in oneself.

Narrative therapy is not the only form of therapy to aid trauma survivors’ recovery, group therapy and talk therapy are other common practices of therapy, as well as drug therapy, often being anti-anxiety drugs to alleviate anxiety and depressive symptoms. Some researchers may argue that writing is not necessarily an effective method for healing from trauma, as storytelling only tells stories and does not offer solutions. But this argument ignores the possibilities of self-discovery and connection to others as a result of writing. Of course, expressive writing is not the only thing necessary to healing, it is only a potential piece of the puzzle. It is often thought that just writing about ones’ day will make tomorrow better, but one must actively reflect, question, and devise plans to improve oneself. Writing alone cannot find revelations and emotional enlightenment, it is what we do with it that does. In her article, Lourens wrote “Once these raw stories have been written, writers have to make sense and interpret these free associations” (7). If one truly wants to heal, one must deeply understand the significance of the emotions, not just be aware of them.

In conclusion, expressive writing is an effective tool to use in the journey of healing from trauma, not as the sole facilitator of it. The advantages and power of narration, validation of feelings and actuality of experiences, and connection and communication offered by writing are unique to other methods used for healing from trauma. Expressive writing can offer so many different and dynamic insights to people suffering, whether or not they believe their trauma is severe enough to be treated, or just a minor road bump in their story of life.

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WRITING STORIES

Looking for a way to process your experiences related to the flooding events of November 2021?

Dr. Michelle Superle, Associate Professor at UFV and Research Associate at the UFV Food and Agriculture Centre can help!

Come to a free workshop to learn quick, simple, effective techniques that will help you settle your feelings about your experiences in the floods...

- **Free “Writing as a Way of Healing” workshops...**
 - In YARROW!
 - Monday, February 28th, 7:30-8:30 pm, Yarrow Community Hall Seniors’ Lounge
 - Saturday, March 5th, 3:00-4:00 pm, Yarrow Community Hall Seniors’
 - At UFV!
 - Friday, March 4th, 1:00-2:00 pm, Abbotsford campus, Room A 203B
 - Monday, March 7th, 4:15-5:15 pm, Abbotsford campus, Room A 203B
 - More dates TBA—stay tuned!
 - Custom and/or Zoom sessions will be arranged for groups that submit a request—just ask! 😊

***Dr. Superle developed the “Writing as a Way of Healing” workshops based on extensive research that shows

- You DON’T have to be a writer to benefit!
- This simple form of journaling is open to everyone
- Just 4 journaling sessions of 20 minutes each WILL help you feel better!
- No experience or equipment needed—just a piece of paper and a pen

For more info or to schedule a custom session for your friends/family, get in touch with Dr. Superle at michelle.superle@ufv.ca

WRITING AS A WAY OF HEALING

Workshop

Developed and facilitated by

Lauryn Joly and Dr. Michelle Superle

Introduction:

The Benefits of Expressive Writing¹

What we thought happened, what we believed happened to us, shifts and changes as we discover deeper and more complex truths. It isn't that we use our writing to deny what we've experienced. Rather, we use it to shift our perspective.

Louise DeSalvo, Writing as a Way of Healing

The books *Writing as a Way of Healing* by Louise DeSalvo and *Opening Up by Writing it Down* by James W. Pennebaker and Joshua M. Smyth provided enlightening information that guided the development of this workshop.

¹ By Lauryn Joly

Both books explore the effects of using writing to connect our feelings with events we've experienced. In these works, the authors concluded that there were no significant benefits from writing superficial commentary about events without including emotional reflections. Further, simply venting emotions without thoughtful reflection tended to make people feel worse. However, by linking a description of the objective details of an experience with the deepest feelings and emotions about them, an understanding and acceptance begins to form—often because the experience is approached from a new perspective.

One of their most important observations is that you DON'T need to be a writer to do expressive writing and experience its benefits! 😊

James W. Pennebaker² was one of the first researchers to discover the benefits of expressive writing, and his early work has since been corroborated by extensive follow-up studies conducted by other researchers.

This research (which is described in both books) found that expressive writing can facilitate many benefits, including:

- A sense of control from owning your story
 - Separating the event from the narrative imposed on it, looking at your experiences more objectively, and connecting your personal feelings to your experiences can change how you view what happened. (DeSalvo)
- Reduced anxiety and psychological stress
 - Pennebaker and Smyth suggest that therapeutic writing provides a relief similar to that experienced when an individual makes a confession.
- Enhanced understanding

² "James W. Pennebaker, PhD is a nationally recognized expert on the connection between writing and better health. He and his students are exploring the links between traumatic experiences, expressive writing, natural language use, and physical and mental health. His studies find that physical health and work performance can improve by simple writing and/or talking exercises....He is the Regents Centennial Professor of Liberal Arts and the Departmental Chair in the Psychology Department at the University of Texas at Austin.... Pennebaker has written or edited nine books and over 250 articles....He has received numerous awards and honors, including Distinguished Contributions to Social and Personality Psychology and the Outstanding Book Award from the Society of Personality and Social Psychology." <https://expressivewriting.org/about-the-authors/>

- Putting the experience into words makes it easier to understand, because you can see and read the language of something that you may not have spoken out loud before. (Pennebaker and Smyth)
- Increased immunity
 - Studies have found that people who wrote about their thoughts and feelings after traumatic experiences had increased T-lymphocytes when compared with the members of a group who wrote about superficial topics. (Pennebaker and Smyth)

While there are many benefits of expressive writing, it is also true that it can be uncomfortable—especially at first. Pennebaker and Smyth advise, “Many people report that after writing, they sometimes feel somewhat sad, although this typically goes away in a couple of hours. If you find that you are getting extremely upset about a writing topic, simply stop writing or change topics”³.

According to Louise DeSalvo⁴, expressive writing is most beneficial when undertaken with good self care in place. She finds that her own expressive writing process feels safest when she’s providing herself with good care, and she urges her students to do the same.

In particular, DeSalvo recommends

- A steady, calm, predictable daily routine
- Emotional support, for example by checking in with friends regularly
- Working with a therapist
- Keeping a journal “about the positive aspects of [your] life to maintain [your] perspective while [you] work” (Page 105).

³ Page 26, *Opening Up by Writing It Down: How Expressive Writing Improves Health and Eases Emotional Pain*. By James W. Pennebaker and Joshua M. Smyth. Guilford Press, 2016. <https://www.guilford.com/books/Opening-Up-by-Writing-It-Down/Pennebaker-Smyth/9781462524921>

⁴ “Dr. Louise DeSalvo taught writing and literature at Hunter College in Manhattan. Her ‘Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work’ (1989), was named one of the most important books of the 20th century by Women’s Review of Books.” <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/11/obituaries/louise-desalvo-dead.html>

DeSalvo states that it was especially powerful to write about “what I was excited by, proud of, grateful for, enjoying most, committed to, learning, and giving/sharing. So, though I was writing about pain, my journal acted as a welcome respite and necessary balance” (Page 105).

Besides these foundational works on expressive writing, we have also been strongly influenced and inspired by the principles of narrative therapy⁵ as it was pioneered by Dr. Stephen Madigan⁶. Therefore, we have created this resource package in alignment with the techniques of narrative therapy, which aim to support and foster resilience.

⁵ See *Narrative Therapy* by Stephen Madigan. American Psychological Association, 2019.
https://books.google.ca/books/about/Narrative_Therapy.html?id=fjAovQEACAAJ&redir_esc=y

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Writing as a Way of Healing

Workshop

Developed and facilitated by

Lauryn Joly and Dr. Michelle Superle

We can use our writing...to affirm our very significant strengths. For every survivor has them.

Louise DeSalvo, Writing as a Way of Healing

Warmup Activity #1

Describe your favourite place using each one of your senses.

Step 1: Brainstorming

My favourite place

is _____

It looks like...	It sounds like...	It smells like...	It tastes like...	It feels like...

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Step 2: Writing

Describe your favourite place using each one of your senses.

Warmup Activity #2

Recall and reflect upon the greatest challenge you've ever faced. Now describe what you're most proud of in relation to how you coped with the situation.

Expressive Writing Activity #1

To be completed during the workshop.

Brainstorming—take 20 minutes to make some notes in response to these prompts.

What I experienced during the November 2021 Fraser Valley flooding events	The order of the main events I experienced
	1 2 3 4 5 6
What I thought about it at the time	How I felt about it when it was happening

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What I think about it now	How I feel about it now

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The Flood Stories Project

How I processed the event through my senses

What I saw	What I heard	What I smelled	What I tasted	What I touched/felt

How my pre-existing skills helped me during the experience	I'm most proud of how I...

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What I've learned about myself through the experience	How I'm stronger and wiser now

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What sustained me during the flooding event(s)	What sustains me now

The Flood Stories Project

What I've learned about myself that makes me proud to be me...

HOMEWORK!!!

Keep a JOY JOURNAL—daily

Take one minute every single day to jot down an experience that brought you pleasure that day.

You can note how it made you feel if you'd like, but the most important thing is to describe the experience in as much detail as possible.

In particular, make sure to connect the experience with at least one of your senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, and/or smell).

Example: I loved hearing the birds sing when I woke up this morning. They sounded like a little choir. They reminded me that Spring is on the way.

Expressive Writing Activity #2

To be completed at home the day after the workshop.

*Advice from Pennebaker and Smyth⁷ on how best to complete this activity:

“Find a quiet time and place for this...writing exercise. Write for 20 to 30 minutes, focusing on your deepest emotions and thoughts about a stressful or upsetting experience in your life. Whatever you choose to write about, it is critical that you really let go and explore your very deepest emotions and thoughts. Write continuously, and don't worry about spelling, grammar, or style.

Warning: Many people report that after writing, they sometimes feel somewhat sad, although this typically goes away in a couple of hours. If you find that you are getting extremely upset about a writing topic, simply stop writing or change topics” (Page 26).

⁷ *Opening Up by Writing It Down: How Expressive Writing Improves Health and Eases Emotional Pain*. By James W. Pennebaker and Joshua M. Smyth. Guilford Press, 2016. <https://www.guilford.com/books/Opening-Up-by-Writing-It-Down/Pennebaker-Smyth/9781462524921>

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Take 20 minutes to write about your experiences in the floods, using ideas you generated with the prompts above. Make certain to include BOTH your thoughts AND your feelings in your description.

The Flood Stories Project

Expressive Writing Activity #3

To be completed at home the day after Activity #2.

*Before you start, make sure to review the advice from Pennebaker and Smyth on how best to complete this exercise—see Activity #2 on page 12!

Take 20 minutes to write a simple version of your flood story, using the material you generated in Activities 1 and 2.

Make certain to include BOTH your thoughts AND your feelings in your description.

The Flood Stories Project

Expressive Writing Activity #4

To be completed at home the day after Activity #3.

*Before you start, make sure to review the advice from Pennebaker and Smyth on how best to complete this exercise—see Activity #2 on page 12!

Take 20 minutes to re-write a more detailed version of your flood story, using the simple version you drafted in Activity #3 and fleshing it out.

Make certain to include BOTH your thoughts AND your feelings in your description.

Expressive Writing Activity #5

To be completed at home one week after completing Activity #4.

Take 20 minutes to complete this letter writing exercise.

Write a letter to yourself, pretending to be your parent, godparent, aunt, uncle, grandparent, or ‘future self’. In this scenario, you are a very beloved child.

Include the following components in the letter:

- Describe how and why you are proud of yourself for coming through this difficult experience.
- Offer yourself encouragement and compassion—the way you would to a child that you care very deeply about and for whom you wish to provide the most loving emotional support.
- Recommend three self-care activities to the child (for example, re-watch one of your favourite funny movies, take a nap, go for a walk in your favourite place), and give the child permission to take the time and energy to enjoy these pursuits.
- Sign off with your greatest hope for the child (for example, I hope that you’ll soon be able to enjoy the sunset again, or, I hope that you’ll feel ready to visit your friends soon, or, I hope that you’ll begin to take pleasure in cooking again) as they heal from the experience—and provide assurance of your confidence that they will get there in their own good time.

The Flood Stories Project

Appendix

Excerpts from *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives*, by Louise DeSalvo. Beacon Press, Boston, 1999.

Page 11

As a teacher of writing, I regularly witness the physical and emotional transformation of my students. I can see how they change physically and psychically when they work on writing projects...that grow from a deep, authentic place, when they confront their pain in their work. Through reading scientific studies, I have learned that writing can help anyone—not just people who consider themselves writers—significantly improve their psychic states and also their physiological well-being.

Pages 13-15

Why Write?

Writing is cheap. You don't need special equipment to begin. Only some paper and a pen....

Writing doesn't need to take much time. Though we can take as long as we choose (or as we have), we can write for, say, only twenty minutes or so...whenever we can, and we can continue to reap the benefits of writing....

Writing is self-initiated; writing is flexible. We can write when we can. We can write when we choose. We can write when we write best....

Writing is private, or you can share it. We can keep our writing to ourselves....

Writing is portable. It can be done practically anywhere....

Writing can be done whether we're well or ill.

....

*Writing to heal requires no innate talent, though we become more skilled as we write, especially when we pay careful attention to the process of our writing....*the writing I suggest here we all can manage. Learning something about the writing process, and learning to witness our writing practice...enables us to use writing in a deeper way.

Page 24

Confronting the chaos of our most difficult memories and feelings...and translating them into coherent language can have “remarkable short- and long-term health benefits.” For when we deal with unassimilated events, when we tell our stories and describe our feelings and integrate them into our sense of self, we no longer must actively work at inhibition. This alleviates the stress of holding back [25] our stories and repressing or hiding our emotions, and so our health improves.

Page 25

Writing that describes traumatic or distressing events in detail *and* how we felt about these events then and feel about them now is the only kind of writing about trauma that clinically has been associated with improved health.

....

In other words, we can't improve our health by free-writing...or by writing objective descriptions of our trauma or by venting our emotions. We cannot simply use writing as catharsis. Nor can we use it only as a record of what we've experienced. *We must write in a way that links detailed descriptions of what happened with feelings—then and now—about what happened.*

Both thinking and feeling are involved. Linking them is critical....

In controlled clinical experiments, then, only writing that describes *traumatic events and our deepest thoughts and feelings about them, past and present, is linked with improved immune function, improved emotional and physical health, and behavioral changes indicating that we feel able to act on our own behalf.* And this was accomplished in the experiments by only one hour of writing—fifteen minutes a day—over a four-day period!

Page 43

Expressing [the shock] in language robs the event of its power to hurt us; it also assuages our pain. And by expressing ourselves in language, by examining these shocks, we paradoxically experience delight—pleasure, even—which comes from the discoveries we make as we write, from the order we create from seeming randomness or chaos.

Ultimately, then, writing about difficulties enables us to discover the wholeness of things, the connectedness of human experience. We understand that our greatest shocks do not separate us from humankind. Instead, through expressing ourselves, we establish our connection with others and with the world.

Page 57

What are the transformative qualities we can aim for as we write?

A healing narrative renders our experience concretely, authentically, explicitly, and with a richness of detail.

It tells precisely what happened. It is accurate. It is rooted in time and in place. We describe when and where this happened. We describe the people who were fully involved.... We describe things in a way that is uniquely, authentically ours; our narrative can't sound as if someone other than ourselves has written it.

Research has demonstrated that depressed and suicidal people are much less likely to report memories or happenings in an extremely specific way. Instead, recollections tend to be overly general and vague....when narratives are reported in an overgeneralized way, any situation seems more catastrophic than it really is.

Page 59

A healing narrative links feelings to events.

It describes how we felt then and how we feel now. It compares and contrasts past feelings about and current feelings about events. It charts the similarities or differences in our feelings over time.

....

A healing narrative is a balanced narrative. It uses negative words to describe emotions and feelings in moderation; but it uses positive words, too.

....

“How can we possibly write positively about a painful subject?” I’ve often been asked. “By describing what sustained us during that time,” I say.

Page 60

A study by Pennebaker discovered that the more people described positive emotions in their writing, the more likely they were to be healthier afterward. But describing negative emotions either excessively or very little or not at all correlated with poorer health. Describing negative emotions in moderation correlated with improved health.

This suggests that we profit most from understanding an event's positive and negative aspects. We must not, of course, deny our negative feelings: we must express them. But neither must we deny our positive feelings: these also must be expressed. Balanced narratives make us feel hopeful.

....

A healing narrative reveals insights we've achieved from our painful experiences.

A healing narrative doesn't just narrate what happened to us and how we feel. It is a way for us to reflect upon the significance of what happened. It connects our experiences to other experiences in our lives or to those of other people or to society.

Page 61

A word of caution. Reflections about cause and effect that can harm us are based on questions like "Why did this happen to me?", "What did I do to deserve this?", "How did I invite this?" Questions such as these indicated that we are ready to blame ourselves for the trauma that occurred, and such self-blame is harmful. It is more helpful to examine our personal experiences in a broader context.

....

Often, our narratives begin in chaos. They become healing narratives as we organize them, as we ask ourselves, "Then what happened?", "Who was there?", "Why?", "Did that happen before or after?"

Page 74

It is not what you write or what you produce as you write that is important. It is what happens to you while you are writing that is important. It is who you become while you are writing that is important.

Page 104

Before I began writing, I had learned what I needed to do to write without precipitating an emotional crisis. I knew now that to take risks on the page without endangering ourselves, we must do so from a position of relative emotional safety. I prepared to do the work, and as I worked I continued caring for myself, “What must I do to write this...and enjoy the process of doing it, though I’ll be working with difficult emotional material?”

Page 105

I always had emotional support available. I checked in with my...friends weekly, sometimes daily. And I was in therapy while writing, which helped integrate the difficult and shameful feelings my writing was unearthing. I wrote in my journal, too, about the positive aspects of my life to maintain my perspective while I worked.

....

I began to write about what I was happy about in my work, what I was excited by, proud of, grateful for, enjoying most, committed to, learning, and giving/sharing. So, though I was writing about pain, my journal acted as a welcome respite and necessary balance.

Page 154

As a child, [Alice] Walker wrote to comfort herself...Walker compares her lifesaving habits to the tradition of Native American sand painting. In Native American cultures, she reports, “when you feel sick at heart, you do sand paintings. Or you make a basket. The thing is that you are focused on creating something. And while you’re doing that, there’s a kind of spiritual alchemy that happens and you turn that bad

feeling into something that becomes a golden light. It's all because you are intensely creating something that is beautiful. And in Native American cultures, by the time you've finished the sand painting, you're well. The point is to heal yourself."

Page 160

bell hooks, in *Daughters of the Yam*, reminds us, though, that not everyone who is severely traumatized can afford to pay for therapy. Writing often provides the only available healing outlet for poor people. James W. Pennebaker and Amina Memon, in "Recovered Memories in Context," say writing about extreme trauma has proved so helpful precisely because it is self-directed and unmediated by another person. Stephanie Mines, in *Sexual Abuse, Sacred Wound*, says that if therapy for abuse survivors "involves the creative arts, the intervention or supervision of a therapist may not be necessary."

Page 175

But trauma acts, too, as a "strong stimulus to the imagination," as the distressed person tries to replace what has been lost or to restore what has been damaged. Creativity, then, seems a basic human response to trauma and a natural "emergency defense against depression."

One important reason this is so is that writing conveys messages to the self about the inner state. Unfortunately...this healing function of creativity isn't well known, even among therapists and literary critics, much less among...ordinary people, all of whom could benefit enormously from knowing about this age-old means of psychic self-care and how it functions.

The psychic repair accomplished by writing may never be final or complete, especially in cases of extreme trauma or abuse. Still, the [176] ongoing discipline of writing may help us ward off the most crippling aspects of depression. Because...depression and obsession go hand in hand—we continuously revisit the traumatic event—writing serves as a distraction. It can provide new and healthier obsessions (especially if the writer pays attention to [daily] ritual and order). And, perhaps most important, it can provide an imaginative, healing antitoxin (to use the word that Anais Nin used to describe her writing) to our psychic pain.

Page 176

We can use our writing...to affirm our very significant strengths. For every survivor has them.

WRITING AS A WAY OF HEALING

Workshop

Developed by

Lauryn Joly and Dr. Michelle Superle

Introduction:

The Benefits of Expressive Writing⁸

What we thought happened, what we believed happened to us, shifts and changes as we discover deeper and more complex truths. It isn't that we use our writing to deny what we've experienced.

Rather, we use it to shift our perspective.

Louise DeSalvo, Writing as a Way of Healing

The books *Writing as a Way of Healing* by Louise DeSalvo and *Opening Up by Writing it Down* by James W. Pennebaker and Joshua M. Smyth provided enlightening information that guided the development of this workshop.

⁸ By Lauryn Joly

Both books explore the effects of using writing to connect our feelings with events we've experienced. In these works, the authors concluded that there were no significant benefits from writing superficial commentary about events without including emotional reflections. Further, simply venting emotions without thoughtful reflection tended to make people feel worse. However, by linking a description of the objective details of an experience with the deepest feelings and emotions about them, an understanding and acceptance begins to form—often because the experience is approached from a new perspective.

One of their most important observations is that you DON'T need to be a writer to do expressive writing and experience its benefits! 😊

James W. Pennebaker⁹ was one of the first researchers to discover the benefits of expressive writing, and his early work has since been corroborated by extensive follow-up studies conducted by other researchers.

This research (which is described in both books) found that expressive writing can facilitate many benefits, including:

- A sense of control from owning your story
 - Separating the event from the narrative imposed on it, looking at your experiences more objectively, and connecting your personal feelings to your experiences can change how you view what happened. (DeSalvo)
- Reduced anxiety and psychological stress
 - Pennebaker and Smyth suggest that therapeutic writing provides a relief similar to that experienced when an individual makes a confession.
- Enhanced understanding

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- Putting the experience into words makes it easier to understand, because you can see and read the language of something that you may not have spoken out loud before. (Pennebaker and Smyth)
- Increased immunity
 - Studies have found that people who wrote about their thoughts and feelings after traumatic experiences had increased T-lymphocytes when compared with the members of a group who wrote about superficial topics. (Pennebaker and Smyth)

While there are many benefits of expressive writing, it is also true that it can be uncomfortable—especially at first. Pennebaker and Smyth advise, “Many people report that after writing, they sometimes feel somewhat sad, although this typically goes away in a couple of hours. If you find that you are getting extremely upset about a writing topic, simply stop writing or change topics”¹⁰.

According to Louise DeSalvo¹¹, expressive writing is most beneficial when undertaken with good self care in place. She finds that her own expressive writing process feels safest when she’s providing herself with good care, and she urges her students to do the same.

In particular, DeSalvo recommends

- A steady, calm, predictable daily routine
- Emotional support, for example by checking in with friends regularly
- Working with a therapist
- Keeping a journal “about the positive aspects of [your] life to maintain [your] perspective while [you] work” (Page 105).

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Warmup Activity #1

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Step 1: Brainstorming

My favourite place

is _____

It looks like...	It sounds like...	It smells like...	It tastes like...	It feels like...

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--	--	--	--	--

Step 2: Writing

Describe your favourite place using each one of your senses.

Warmup Activity #2

Recall and reflect upon the most difficult challenge you've ever faced. Now describe what you're most proud of in relation to how you coped with the situation.

Expressive Writing Activity #1

To be completed during the workshop. Focus this activity on an upsetting experience you had that's still bothering you.

Brainstorming—take 20 minutes to make some notes in response to these prompts.

What I experienced during event	The order of the main events I experienced
	1 2 3 4 5 6
What I thought about it at the time	How I felt about it when it was happening

The Flood Stories Project

What I think about it now	How I feel about it now

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--	--

How I processed the event through my senses

What I saw	What I heard	What I smelled	What I tasted	What I touched/felt

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How my pre-existing skills helped me during the experience	I'm most proud of how I...
What I've learned about myself through the experience	How I'm stronger and wiser now

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What sustained me during the experience	What sustains me now

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--	--

What I've learned about myself that makes me proud to be me...

HOMEWORK!!!

Keep a JOY JOURNAL—daily

Take one minute every single day to jot down an experience that brought you pleasure that day.

You can note how it made you feel if you'd like, but the most important thing is to describe the experience in as much detail as possible.

In particular, make sure to connect the experience with at least one of your senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, and/or smell).

Example: I loved hearing the birds sing when I woke up this morning. They sounded like a little choir. They reminded me that Spring is on the way.

Expressive Writing Activity #2

To be completed at home the day after the workshop.

*Advice from Pennebaker and Smyth¹⁴ on how best to complete this activity:

“Find a quiet time and place for this...writing exercise. Write for 20 to 30 minutes, focusing on your deepest emotions and thoughts about a stressful or upsetting experience in your life. Whatever you choose to write about, it is critical that you really let go and explore your very deepest emotions and thoughts. Write continuously, and don't worry about spelling, grammar, or style.

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Warning: Many people report that after writing, they sometimes feel somewhat sad, although this typically goes away in a couple of hours. If you find that you are getting extremely upset about a writing topic, simply stop writing or change topics” (Page 26).

Take 20 minutes to write about your frightening experience, using ideas you generated with the prompts above. Make certain to include BOTH your thoughts AND your feelings in your description!

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Expressive Writing Activity #3

To be completed at home the day after Activity #2.

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Take 20 minutes to write a simple version of your story, using the material you generated in Activities 1 and 2.

Make certain to include BOTH your thoughts AND your feelings in your description!

The Flood Stories Project

Expressive Writing Activity #4

To be completed at home the day after Activity #3.

*Before you start, make sure to review the advice from Pennebaker and Smyth on how best to complete this exercise—see Activity #2 on page 12!

Take 20 minutes to re-write a more detailed version of your story, using the simple version you drafted in Activity #3 and fleshing it out.

Make certain to include BOTH your thoughts AND your feelings in your description!

The Flood Stories Project

Expressive Writing Activity #5

To be completed at home one week after completing Activity #4.

Take 20 minutes to complete this letter writing exercise.

Write a letter to yourself, pretending to be your parent, godparent, aunt, uncle, grandparent, or ‘future self’. In this scenario, you are a very beloved child.

Include the following components in the letter:

- Describe how and why you are proud of yourself for coming through this difficult experience.
- Offer yourself encouragement and compassion—the way you would to a child that you care very deeply about and for whom you wish to provide the most loving emotional support.
- Recommend three self-care activities to the child (for example, re-watch one of your favourite funny movies, take a nap, go for a walk in your favourite place), and give the child permission to take the time and energy to enjoy these pursuits.
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Appendix

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*Writing to heal requires no innate talent, though we become more skilled as we write, especially when we pay careful attention to the process of our writing....*the writing I suggest here we all can manage. Learning something about the writing process, and learning to witness our writing practice...enables us to use writing in a deeper way.

Page 24

Confronting the chaos of our most difficult memories and feelings...and translating them into coherent language can have “remarkable short- and long-term health benefits.” For when we deal with unassimilated events, when we tell our stories and describe our feelings and integrate them into our sense of self, we no longer must actively work at inhibition. This alleviates the stress of holding back [25] our stories and repressing or hiding our emotions, and so our health improves.

Page 25

Writing that describes traumatic or distressing events in detail *and* how we felt about these events then and feel about them now is the only kind of writing about trauma that clinically has been associated with improved health.

....

In other words, we can't improve our health by free-writing...or by writing objective descriptions of our trauma or by venting our emotions. We cannot simply use writing as catharsis. Nor can we use it only as a record of what we've experienced. *We must write in a way that links detailed descriptions of what happened with feelings—then and now—about what happened.*

Both thinking and feeling are involved. Linking them is critical....

In controlled clinical experiments, then, only writing that describes *traumatic events and our deepest thoughts and feelings about them, past and present, is linked with improved immune function, improved emotional and physical health, and behavioral changes indicating that we feel able to act on our own behalf.* And this was accomplished in the experiments by only one hour of writing—fifteen minutes a day—over a four-day period!

Page 43

Expressing [the shock] in language robs the event of its power to hurt us; it also assuages our pain. And by expressing ourselves in language, by examining these shocks, we paradoxically experience delight—pleasure, even—which comes from the discoveries we make as we write, from the order we create from seeming randomness or chaos.

Ultimately, then, writing about difficulties enables us to discover the wholeness of things, the connectedness of human experience. We understand that our greatest shocks do not separate us from humankind. Instead, through expressing ourselves, we establish our connection with others and with the world.

Page 57

What are the transformative qualities we can aim for as we write?

A healing narrative renders our experience concretely, authentically, explicitly, and with a richness of detail.

It tells precisely what happened. It is accurate. It is rooted in time and in place. We describe when and where this happened. We describe the people who were fully involved.... We describe things in a way that is uniquely, authentically ours; our narrative can't sound as if someone other than ourselves has written it.

Research has demonstrated that depressed and suicidal people are much less likely to report memories or happenings in an extremely specific way. Instead, recollections tend to be overly general and vague....when narratives are reported in an overgeneralized way, any situation seems more catastrophic than it really is.

Page 59

A healing narrative links feelings to events.

It describes how we felt then and how we feel now. It compares and contrasts past feelings about and current feelings about events. It charts the similarities or differences in our feelings over time.

....

A healing narrative is a balanced narrative. It uses negative words to describe emotions and feelings in moderation; but it uses positive words, too.

....

“How can we possibly write positively about a painful subject?” I’ve often been asked. “By describing what sustained us during that time,” I say.

Page 60

A study by Pennebaker discovered that the more people described positive emotions in their writing, the more likely they were to be healthier afterward. But describing negative emotions either excessively or very little or not at all correlated with poorer health. Describing negative emotions in moderation correlated with improved health.

This suggests that we profit most from understanding an event's positive and negative aspects. We must not, of course, deny our negative feelings: we must express them. But neither must we deny our positive feelings: these also must be expressed. Balanced narratives make us feel hopeful.

....

A healing narrative reveals insights we've achieved from our painful experiences.

A healing narrative doesn't just narrate what happened to us and how we feel. It is a way for us to reflect upon the significance of what happened. It connects our experiences to other experiences in our lives or to those of other people or to society.

Page 61

A word of caution. Reflections about cause and effect that can harm us are based on questions like "Why did this happen to me?", "What did I do to deserve this?", "How did I invite this?" Questions such as these indicated that we are ready to blame ourselves for the trauma that occurred, and such self-blame is harmful. It is more helpful to examine our personal experiences in a broader context.

....

Often, our narratives begin in chaos. They become healing narratives as we organize them, as we ask ourselves, "Then what happened?", "Who was there?", "Why?", "Did that happen before or after?"

Page 74

It is not what you write or what you produce as you write that is important. It is what happens to you while you are writing that is important. It is who you become while you are writing that is important.

Page 104

Before I began writing, I had learned what I needed to do to write without precipitating an emotional crisis. I knew now that to take risks on the page without endangering ourselves, we must do so from a position of relative emotional safety. I prepared to do the work, and as I worked I continued caring for myself, “What must I do to write this...and enjoy the process of doing it, though I’ll be working with difficult emotional material?”

Page 105

I always had emotional support available. I checked in with my...friends weekly, sometimes daily. And I was in therapy while writing, which helped integrate the difficult and shameful feelings my writing was unearthing. I wrote in my journal, too, about the positive aspects of my life to maintain my perspective while I worked.

....

I began to write about what I was happy about in my work, what I was excited by, proud of, grateful for, enjoying most, committed to, learning, and giving/sharing. So, though I was writing about pain, my journal acted as a welcome respite and necessary balance.

Page 154

As a child, [Alice] Walker wrote to comfort herself...Walker compares her lifesaving habits to the tradition of Native American sand painting. In Native American cultures, she reports, “when you feel sick at heart, you do sand paintings. Or you make a basket. The thing is that you are focused on creating something. And while you’re doing that, there’s a kind of spiritual alchemy that happens and you turn that bad

feeling into something that becomes a golden light. It's all because you are intensely creating something that is beautiful. And in Native American cultures, by the time you've finished the sand painting, you're well. The point is to heal yourself."

Page 160

bell hooks, in *Daughters of the Yam*, reminds us, though, that not everyone who is severely traumatized can afford to pay for therapy. Writing often provides the only available healing outlet for poor people. James W. Pennebaker and Amina Memon, in "Recovered Memories in Context," say writing about extreme trauma has proved so helpful precisely because it is self-directed and unmediated by another person. Stephanie Mines, in *Sexual Abuse, Sacred Wound*, says that if therapy for abuse survivors "involves the creative arts, the intervention or supervision of a therapist may not be necessary."

Page 175

But trauma acts, too, as a "strong stimulus to the imagination," as the distressed person tries to replace what has been lost or to restore what has been damaged. Creativity, then, seems a basic human response to trauma and a natural "emergency defense against depression."

One important reason this is so is that writing conveys messages to the self about the inner state. Unfortunately...this healing function of creativity isn't well known, even among therapists and literary critics, much less among...ordinary people, all of whom could benefit enormously from knowing about this age-old means of psychic self-care and how it functions.

The psychic repair accomplished by writing may never be final or complete, especially in cases of extreme trauma or abuse. Still, the [176] ongoing discipline of writing may help us ward off the most crippling aspects of depression. Because...depression and obsession go hand in hand—we continuously revisit the traumatic event—writing serves as a distraction. It can provide new and healthier obsessions (especially if the writer pays attention to [daily] ritual and order). And, perhaps most important, it can provide an imaginative, healing antitoxin (to use the word that Anais Nin used to describe her writing) to our psychic pain.

Page 176

We can use our writing...to affirm our very significant strengths. For every survivor has them.

Expressive Writing Workshop

Writing as a Way of Healing, Part 2!

Instructor: Michelle Superle

Making sense of your life starts with questions, not answers. ~ Allison Fallon

One of the secrets of a happy life is continuous small treats. ~ Iris Murdoch

At the **“Write Your Story”** expressive writing workshops, coaches Alison Fallon and Donald Miller help participants conceptualize life events they’ve experienced in the form of a three-act screenplay, like this:

“Act 1:

The Challenge

Identify the challenge you’ve experienced that you’re going to write your story about.

Act 2:

The Fight

Explain how the fight to overcome that challenge changed your life and made you a better person.

**Act 3:
The Transformation**

Realize and own the fact that you are different so you can leave the old you behind.”

From <https://writeyourstory.com/>

Intrigued? Excited? Inspired?

Good! Let's write!

First thing you need to know: **Expressive writing is for everyone—not just writers.**

Research shows that 15-20 minute expressive writing sessions can help anyone support their mental and physical health. Expressive writing is meant to be a private form—not for sharing. It provides a platform to make sense of personal experiences. There are two basic approaches you can use to incorporate the power of expressive writing into your life: writing to heal, and writing to feel.

You can turn to **Writing for Healing** as a tool to process major life events and exceptionally difficult experiences. This approach involves 4 sessions of 15-20 minutes each, and is best used for “one off” type situations.

In contrast, you can use **Writing for Feeling** daily (or several times a week) to help regulate your emotions, make sense of your experiences, and stay focused on what's important to you.

Level 1: Writing for Healing—Processing Hard Stuff

*See booklet!

Level 2: Writing for Feeling—Daily Self Care

Unless otherwise noted, the suggestions and prompts in this section come from *The Power of Writing It Down: A Simple Habit to Unlock Your Brain and Reimagine Your Life* by Allison Fallon, which I heartily recommend (and the page numbers you see refer to the pages in this book).

To get a free PDF of Chapter 1, click here! <https://thepowerofwritingitdown.com/>

When Fallon describes the power and importance of expressive writing, she says, “let me be clear: what I’m not saying is that writing can ‘cure’ you of whatever problem or difficulty you are currently facing. . . . Sometimes it can help to light the path before us, to put us back in touch with our own power. Sometimes it can help us ask better questions and—hopefully—get better answers. It’s a way we can try at least to make sense out of the chaos. It’s not everything. But it’s something” (page 89).

According to Fallon, “making sense of your life starts with questions, not answers”(page 78).

Here’s a great warmup question to get you focused; you can even use it every time you sit down to write. List everything that’s “true right now” for you (page 106).

Next, here are some big questions to think about as you embark on an expressive writing practice, because expressive writing can help you answer them (from page 78):

- “Am I okay?”
- Can I be myself?
- If I am myself, will people reject me?
- What do I do with a faith that no longer fits me?
- Can I make peace with the people in this world who will not accept me?”
- “What truth am I not telling?” (page 106)

Now that you know a bit about the benefits of establishing a regular expressive writing practice for self care, I recommend pausing to try a warmup activity that really taps into the spirit of expressive writing.

First, read the picture book *The Heart’s Song*, by Gilles Tibo:
<https://49thshelf.com/Books/T/The-Heart-s-Song>

Now that you’ve experienced Miss Matilda’s story, here are some reflective questions to get you thinking in the expressive writing mode:

What brings you joy?

What do *you* fix as a way of helping others?

How do you help mend a broken heart? (Yours and/or someone else's)

How would you like your community to support you after you've experienced loss?

How do you bring others joy to others?

How do you bring others joy to others?

What is *your* heart's song?

Now that you're in the expressive writing groove, you can try out an expressive writing activity that Allison Fallon calls "*The Infinity Prompt*", which she developed to help you "turn your life into stories worth telling". You can use the infinity prompt an endless number of times to explore any experience you've had or situation you've been in. Give it a try!

First: "You'll need to pick a circumstance from your life that you'd like to write about.... If nothing comes to mind right away, consider an event of your life that feels 'charged'. By 'charged', all I mean is that it has some electricity to it. You feel it in your body. The could be something as simple as getting honked at in traffic this morning.... Big event, small event, it doesn't matter. The point is that it is an event that matters to you" (page 97).

Then, "Once you have the event you'd like to write about, get out a pen and a piece of paper and answer the following questions.

1. Facts: What are the facts of what happened?

'Something' took place in your life. When you write about facts, pretend you are describing it as though it's happening in front of you on a movie screen.... Facts are the objective details of what happened: who, what, where, and when.

2. Story: What is the story I am telling myself about what happened?

We create stories based on our *thoughts* about the facts of what has happened to us. These stories stem from our *interpretation* of what happened. A great way to get to the story is to say, ‘What this meant to me was...’ or ‘The reason I think this took place is...’

3. Feelings: How do I feel about what happened and about the story I’m telling myself?

A great way to name a feeling is to talk about where you feel it in your body.... take a minute and go over what you’ve written above—the facts and the story. What do you *feel* in your body?

4. Actions: What did I do to engage or disengage with what I felt?

The action...is the thing you do *because* you feel the thing you felt, or to *keep* from feeling it.... [for example] ‘To keep from feeling this feeling in my body, the action I take is...’

5. Result: what was the outcome of the chosen action?

This is what happens as a result of your actions. For example, if your action (response to shame) is to hide, the result might be that you are isolated and alone. If you feel yourself getting defensive (‘But it wasn’t my fault!’) or resistant (‘What else could I have done?’), know that you’re on the right track. This is all a natural and normal part of the journey you are on” (pages 98-99).

In addition to the 5 questions Fallon has developed for the Infinity Prompt, I (Michelle!) am adding 3 follow-up questions for you to reflect on and write about—for a total of 8—the infinity symbol!

So, after you’ve completed Fallon’s 5 questions, move on to these next questions that I’m posing:

6) How does this experience demonstrate your strengths?

Although your first five reflections on this experience may not seem to focus on or reflect your strengths, it’s important to recognize that every situation we experience

does in some way show our unique strengths. So branch out in your thinking! Figure out which of your personal strengths helped you in the experience you're writing about.

7) How does this experience offer an opportunity to practice a skill you're working on that will help you live your life the way you want to be living it?

For example, are you working on a way of changing your thinking or behavior that you could have tried out in this situation? If so, then write a description of how you could have applied the skill during the experience. Describe what may have occurred if you had applied the skill.

OR!!!

If you are not currently practicing a skill that might have been relevant in this experience, then how does the experience reveal an area where you could learn a new skill to help you unlearn an old way of thinking or acting that is preventing you from living your life the way you want to be living it?

For example, perhaps you were taught during your childhood that the way to cope with getting honked at in traffic is to roll down your window, shout at the other driver, and give them the finger. But if you are now striving to live your life in a way that allows you to feel calm and peaceful as much as possible, then you may decide that you want to unlearn that old habit and learn a new way of being in such a situation. You may decide that you want to learn the skill of deep breathing so that when you get honked at in traffic, you can take deep breaths instead of shouting at the other driver.

If this is the case for you, then here is your prompt:

My old habit of _____ is no longer serving me well. I would like to learn to _____ instead. Once I have practiced, then I will be able to do _____ during an experience like this one. This will bring me closer to the life I want to be living because_____.

8) How will you use this experience to reorient yourself towards the joyful life you imagine for yourself?

If you're anything like me, you tend to conclude an exercise like this one full of regrets, with a pinch of self-loathing thrown in. But that mindset is a dead end. It won't serve us as we keep striving towards the lives we imagine ourselves flourishing in. So, to conclude this expressive writing exercise, take a moment to decide how you're going to use this experience to re-emphasize and re-commit to how you want to be living your life.

WARNING!

***There are 3 potential pitfalls to watch out for during this process, according to Fallon:**

-- "You might mistake your thoughts or feelings for facts" (page 103).

*Hi, it's Michelle 😊 Just wanted to say—for this one, the Feelings Wheel might help! Check it out:

<https://legacy.camosun.ca/covid19/documents/camhelps/9-Feelings-Wheel-Handout-2019.pdf>

-- "Having a hard time applying words to your thoughts" (page 103).

*Hi, it's Michelle 😊 Just wanted to say—for this one, some of the tips from this fun and funny blog post might help! Check it out:

<https://advice.theshineapp.com/articles/5-ways-to-write-through-tough-emotions-because-to-all-the-boys-ive-loved/>

-- Believing that expressive writing can enable you to become your own therapist; "by using expressive writing **in tandem with** therapy, I've seen... [people] fast-tracking their progress" (104). *More on this at the end of this resource booklet! 😊

During expressive writing, when you're turning your life experiences into coherent stories, an **especially exciting opportunity** is "the ending that hasn't been written". Fallon promises that you *can* "**get to a 'happily ever after'**" (page 169).

She admits that while we're living our lives, "It's painful to sit and wait and wonder what's going to happen. It's painful to stay in the story when we don't know. But the reason we write our stories while we are in them is that it helps us to see more clearly. When we map out a story the way an author maps out a memoir, it helps us see where

we are in the story right now. It helps us expand our ideas about how the story might end. And it helps us move in the direction we would most like to go” (page 171).

Fallon reminds us that “The idea that stories have to wrap up perfectly in order to wrap up at all is not only untrue, it often keeps us from finding the deeper, better resolution. Even when the facts of our story can’t change, our thoughts and feelings about the story can....

No matter what story you are looking to resolve in your life...don’t forget what you have already learned and know to be true:

- You are the protagonist in your own story. The resolution will be about you and nobody else.
- Your narrator voice knows everything you need to know because it knows you better than anybody else does.
- While the external problems in our stories don’t always perfectly resolve, the internal problems can and do” (page 174).

During the past decade, Fallon has worked with hundreds of people to help them find their stories. She knows that everyone is “waiting for a hopeful ending” (179). At the conclusion of *The Power of Writing it Down*, Fallon offers this hopeful promise to her readers: “I wonder if it will help you to know that when writers come to work with me to map out their personal stories, they are almost *always* standing in this kind of chaotic, unresolved moment....

If you think of your life as a story, consider that maybe all is not lost, but that you’re just standing in the “all is lost” moment right now. How does it change the way you see it? You are the only hero of your story. You are the protagonist. Only you can decide what happens next” (page 180).

Oh hi! It’s Michelle again 😊 You can try this out by adding a conclusion to every experience you’re righting about. Include a description of “what happens next”—you can even add more than one possibility for what happens next!

*So then, as you conclude every expressive writing session, you can finish with the question, **“What happens next?”**

Infinity and beyond...

According to Fallon, “When we make even a small commitment to put our words on paper, we never know what might happen. But one possibility is this: our voices will carry us and come back to us from the past. They will remind us who we are. Again and again and again.

Through the gift of the written word, you now have a tool to digest and metabolize all that happens to you” (page 184).

You can create beauty in your life because “When you exercise the power of language to name how you think and feel about [“uncomfortable or alarming” things], those things no longer have power over you. They no longer overwhelm you” (page 185).

Hi, it’s Michelle again! 😊 Next, I recommend that you make a conscious decision to bring beauty and joy to your life by writing. Try this...

Prompt 1: Write a letter to yourself that you will open one year from today.

Prompt 2: What brings you joy in your life right now? If you could change one thing in your life, what would you change to ensure that you experienced more joy?

Fallon leaves us with some final thoughts: “when your heart pulls you to write things down, it’s often an invitation to some measure of healing and relief. When the words come, the writing life draws us back to the one thing that can never be taken away, regardless of our unexplainable losses: our voice. Writing is not a cure-all. But it does invite us to reconnect with our memory, to make meaning of our unique experience and sometimes to speak the truth we didn’t feel we could speak anywhere else” (page 190).

Next steps...

If you’re interested in developing your own regular expressive writing practice, then check out Fallon’s super helpful blog post on the kinds of timelines you can expect for the results—improvements to your mental and physical health—to start kicking

in: https://findyourvoice.com/how-long-to-get-writing-results/?utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Feeling+misunderstood%3F+Remember+this&utm_campaign=FYV+Writer+s+Club+%7C+October+10%2C+2022&vgo_ee=51zfCbwYNn73C95sQ3xEwrlCnO62%2BtosOSIPFs19F8o%3D

<https://www.outsideonline.com/gallery/sheep-herding-s-martinez-peru/>

Even more steps...

If you have enjoyed Fallon’s method of expressive writing, you might like to join her club for more ideas to keep you at it. Here’s the link for registration:

https://findyourvoice.com/?vgo_ee=51zfCbwYNn73C95sQ3xEwrlCnO62%2BtosOSIPFs19F8o%3D#writersclub

Here’s another resource for expressive writing journaling prompts.

<https://psychcentral.com/blog/ready-set-journal-64-journaling-prompts-for-self-discovery#the-journal-prompts>

The resource above also includes great tips for developing a regular expressive writing practice. Best of all, there’s a guided method for creating your own self-affirmations!

Another form of expressive writing to consider—grief writing...

Now that you know a bit about expressive writing and have hopefully tried it out, you may have started realizing that some of the experiences you’re writing about involve loss—even grief. You may find it comforting to know that there’s a special subgenre of expressive writing that specifically supports loss and grief, called grief writing or grief journaling.

If this specific focus seems like it would be helpful for you, here are a few resources to check out what it’s all about and even give it a try.

“What kinds of losses can I write about?”

This information comes from the following website:

<https://refugeingrief.com/writing-your-grief/>

“Deaths of anyone important to you: spouses, parents, siblings, children, partners, friends, family members, colleagues – if their death impacts you, you can write about them

Miscarriage, still-birth, TFMR, genetic differences, birth defects and birth-story outcomes tied to loss

Accidents, sudden death, illnesses, natural disasters, & other life-altering changes

Suicide, overdose, violent crime, and other deaths considered “taboo”

Any loss you identify as being deeply part of you – especially if it’s never been acknowledged”

Grief Journaling Prompts

This information is from the following website:

<https://mindfulnessandgrief.com/grief-journaling/>

“One grief journaling study found that directed writing focused on meaning reconstruction topics was more helpful than freeform grief journaling that focused on emotion and disclosure. Grieving participants who received the guided grief prompts experienced long-term improvement on prolonged grief disorder, depressive, and post-traumatic stress symptoms. They also saw improvement in physical health.

Choose a writing prompt from below to get you started...

I remember when you and I...

This is what I have to say to you....

The first time I did _____ without you I....

My happiest memory of you is...

The greatest lesson I have learned is...”

If you give grief journaling a try and find that it’s helpful for you, then you might consider trying a guided journal to give you more momentum and focus. Here’s an

example: https://www.amazon.com/Grief-Peace-navigating-compassion-mindfulness/dp/1800650191/ref=as_li_ss_tl?dchild=1&keywords=from+grief+to+peace&qid=1620076987&sr=8-3&linkCode=sl1&tag=stang0a-20&linkId=a6288a1a86249980069c8afb439e2532&language=en_US

If you want to take it even further, then you might want to try a focused course on grief writing, such as this one: <https://writers.com/course/writing-our-grief>

Beyond grief...

The book *Bittersweet* by Susan Cain is a resource I absolutely adore because it connects grief and joy in powerful, thought-provoking ways. Here are Cain's own Top 10 "Teachings" from *Bittersweet*: https://susancain.net/wp-content/uploads/Bittersweet-Teachings_OneSheet.pdf

I've adapted these beautiful teachings into questions that function as powerful expressive writing prompts. Give them a try!

As you consider the Qs and start writing, be as flexible as possible in your answers and responses. Interpret the Qs in whatever way is most meaningful and relevant for you. There are no wrong answers!

Teaching 1. *Follow your longing where it's telling you to go.*

Prompt 1. What is your longing? Where is telling you to go?

Teaching 2. *Transform your pain into beauty, your longing into belonging.*

Prompt 2. What is beautiful about your pain? How could your longing connect you to belonging?

Teaching 3. *The art we love best, the music we love most, express our yearning for a perfect and beautiful world.*

Prompt 3. What does your perfect and beautiful world look, sound, and feel like?

Teaching 4. *Upbeat tunes make us dance around our kitchens and invite friends for dinner. But sad music makes us want to touch the sky.*

Prompt 4. What yearnings do sad songs stir up for you?

Teaching 5. *Whatever pain you can't get rid of, make it your creative offering.*

Prompt 5. If you turned your pain into a creative offering for your inner circle, your community, and/or the world, what would you want to offer people? How would you hope it would affect them?

Teaching 6. *Creativity has the power to look pain in the eye and turn it into something else.*

Prompt 6. If you could turn your pain into creativity, what project would you want to work on? Why?

Teaching 7. *Our oldest problem is the pain of separation, our deepest dream is the desire for reunion.*

Prompt 7. What reunions do you most desire? How would a joyful reunion look, sound, feel?

Teaching 8. *You don't have to believe in the deities of the ancient books to be transformed by spiritual longing.*

Prompt 8. What is your spiritual longing? (Even if you're not religious.)

Teaching 9. *We transcend grief only when we realize how connected we are with all the other humans who struggle to transcend theirs.*

Prompt 9. With whom does your grief (or sadness) connect you? How?

Teaching 10. *We're just humans: flawed and beautiful and longing for love.*

Prompt 10. What are your beautiful flaws? How are they also your superpowers?

Here is a prompt that encourages you to invite beauty into your every life; it's from Susan Cain's interactive Bittersweet app:

“For today, let's practice how YOU can immerse yourself in beauty every morning. For me, this means sitting down at my laptop, with a latte and candle nearby, visiting a place of inspiration, deep inside my own mind. I look at art, listen to music, take a walk. What are some beautiful objects or practices you could bring to the start of each day? What beauty might you like to share with others? Try to think of some specific examples...”

I highly recommend the app—for many reasons, but especially since it's exceptionally complementary with expressive writing. You can sign up here:

https://courses.susancain.net/?_gl=1%2Ang7uk2%2A_ga%2ANzc3MjY5ODI5LjE2NjU1NTUwNDQ.%2A_ga_6K3L5CX2RP%2AMTY2NTU1NTA0My4xLjAuMTY2NTU1NTA0My4wLjAuMA..&_ga=2.255919561.318701864.1665555044-777269829.1665555044

Towards joy...

Another source I highly recommend as complementary for your expressive writing practice is the book *Joyful* by Ingrid Fetell Lee.

Her “Joyspotter’s Guide” gives you a clear window into Lee’s joyful philosophy. Try using the questions as expressive writing prompts!

<https://attachments.convertkitcdn.com/124728/d54b1dc1-30c3-4739-bcdd-1d6edb17ae51/AoJ-JoyspottersGuide.pdf>

You can sign up for more fabulously joyful guides and resources on Lee’s website:

<https://aestheticsofjoy.com/learn/>

And, in this thought-provoking blog post, Lee poses 5 questions to ask yourself in order to deepen your joy. They make great expressive writing prompts! 😊

<https://aestheticsofjoy.com/2021/02/13/5-questions-to-deepen-your-joy/>

And here’s evidence of something really joyful—achieved by writing merely ONE sentence a day for decades!

https://www.tiktok.com/@iamdarbysdad/video/7151911417627643178?_kx=Ma4U40-

[okvLzHz_THb5Ub3P_fpXBMe7qKsf6NQKRdGc%3D.RbtsBF&_r=1&_t=8WLN_GNAgZRb&is_from_webapp=v1&item_id=7151911417627643178&utm_campaign=5%20Things%20Newsletter%3A%20October%2014th%2C%202022%20%2801GF9EBDNF1E0ARF9RCCDWM9DC%29&utm_medium=email&utm_source=5%20Things%20Newsletter](https://www.tiktok.com/@iamdarbysdad/video/7151911417627643178?_kx=Ma4U40-okvLzHz_THb5Ub3P_fpXBMe7qKsf6NQKRdGc%3D.RbtsBF&_r=1&_t=8WLN_GNAgZRb&is_from_webapp=v1&item_id=7151911417627643178&utm_campaign=5%20Things%20Newsletter%3A%20October%2014th%2C%202022%20%2801GF9EBDNF1E0ARF9RCCDWM9DC%29&utm_medium=email&utm_source=5%20Things%20Newsletter)

As you’ll recall from the Writing to Heal workshop, I recommend keeping a daily joy journal. **Here’s the prompt:**

Take one minute to write one sentence describing one thing that made you happy today.

You can do this!

Next level steps...

If you want to take your expressive writing practice even further, then you might enjoy learning about one of the therapeutic methods it's related to—narrative therapy.

Here's a great explanation of narrative therapy (which is meant to occur under the guidance of a trained mental health professional):

<https://positivepsychology.com/narrative-therapy/>

If this sounds like your jam, then you can give it a try on your own with these writing exercises: <https://positivepsychology.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/3-Positive-Psychology-Tools.pdf> ***NOTE!!! These exercises are written for and directed to professional therapists, but you can safely work through them at home alone.

And if you decide you want to work with a therapist who specializes in narrative therapy, then here's a directory:

<https://counsellingbc.com/counsellors/approach/narrative-therapy-229/practice?inline=true&page=1>

Many therapists offer a sliding scale for session fees.

And, finally, here are some books I recommend for supporting your expressive writing practice:

Denborough, David. *Retelling the Stories of Our Lives: Everyday Narrative Therapy to Draw Inspiration and Transform Experience.*

DeSalvo, Louise. *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives.*

Fallon, Allison. *The Power of Writing It Down: A Simple Habit to Unlock Your Brain and Reimagine Your Life.*

Heermann, Tammy. *Reframe Your Story: Real Talk for Women Who Want to Let Go, Do Less and Be More.*

Marinella, Sandra. *The Story You Need to Tell: Writing to Heal from Trauma, Illness, or Loss.*

Pennebaker, James, and Joshua Smyth. *Opening Up by Writing It Down: How Expressive Writing Improves Health and Eases Emotional Pain.*

Happy writing! 😊

**WRITING AS A WAY OF HEALING
WORKSHOP**
with
Lauryn Joly and Dr. Michelle Superle

Guess What? Expressive Writing Helps!

The kind of writing you'll try today helps people a lot.

Scientists at universities have done research that shows this kind of writing helps people

- Feel calmer and happier
- Get sick less often
- Understand themselves better

And you don't even need to be "good" at writing for this to help you! Spelling and grammar don't matter at all 😊

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Sometimes, though, people feel a bit worse after they do this kind of writing. If this happens to you, remember that the feeling should pass in a couple of hours.

If it doesn't, or if this kind of writing makes you feel very, very upset, then stop! Find an adult you trust, and ask them for help.

If you keep writing while you feel really upset, then it won't help you at all. Stop writing! Do something else instead.

This workshop was designed to help you process the recent flooding events—but you can use this kind of writing to work through any difficult or upsetting situation you've experienced. All you have to do is change the wording from “the flooding” to whatever experience you want to explore (for example, “being stuck at home during Covid”).

Warmup Activity #1

My favourite place is

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It looks like...	It sounds like...	It smells like...	It tastes like...	It feels like...

Warmup Activity #2

What is the hardest thing you've ever had to do?

Describe 2 things that make you proud of the way you got through it. (For example, I stayed calm even though it was scary. Or, I talked to someone about how I was feeling when I was worried.)

1.

2.

Workshop Expressive Writing Activity

What happened to me during the flood	The order of the main events I experienced
	1 2 3 4 5
Some thoughts I had during the flooding	Some feelings I had during the flooding
1 2	1 2

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Some thoughts about the flooding I have now	Some feelings about the flooding I have now
1	1
2	2

During the flooding...

I saw	I heard	I smelled	I tasted	I touched/felt
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I have special skills and strengths that helped me during the flooding. Some of them are...	I'm most proud of how I...
1	
2	

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I've learned some important things about myself through the flooding. Some of them are...	Because of the flooding, I am now...
1	Stronger in these ways:
2	Wiser in these ways:

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Some things that comforted me during the flooding are... (For example, my pet making me feel safe)	Some things that comfort me now are... (For example, the way our neighbours are helping my family.)

Something I learned about myself during the flooding that makes me proud to be me is...

At home expressive writing activities...

Starting the next day after the workshop, work on these writing activities somewhere quiet and calm at home.

Do one writing activity each day. Spend around 15 minutes on each activity.

Remember! If you get very upset while you're writing, then stop. Take a break. If you feel liking trying again, you can choose a different topic. If you still feel too upset to write, then wait until the next day to try again.

If you still feel very upset the next day, do not start writing again. Instead, find an adult you trust and ask for help.

At home activity #1

Describe your experience of the floods using the ideas you brainstormed during the workshop.

Don't worry about making mistakes! Just write whatever you want, however you want to.

IMPORTANT! Make sure you include **BOTH** your thoughts **AND** your feelings in your description.

At home writing activity #2

Write a simple version of your flood story. Pretend you're explaining what happened to someone who does not know anything about it.

Make sure you start at the beginning—what happened first in your flood story. Then describe what happened in the middle of your story. Then finish at the end of your story.

Remember! make sure you include BOTH your thoughts AND your feelings in your story.

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At home writing activity #3

Now add more details to your flood story.

Using the story you created in the at home writing activity #2, write a more detailed version of your flood story.

Try to picture what happened, and add details of what you see, hear, smell, taste, and feel.

Make certain to include BOTH your thoughts AND your feelings in your description.

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At home writing activity #4

Every day, use your joy journal to write down one thing that you enjoyed doing, or one thing that made you happy that day.

For example: I loved hearing the birds sing when I went outside this morning.

*****Hey! We created this workshop using ideas from these books 😊**

Writing as a Way of Healing by Louise DeSalvo

Opening Up by Writing it Down by James W. Pennebaker and Joshua M. Smyth

Narrative Therapy by Stephen Madigan

The Flood Stories project was launched in January 2022 to provide an outlet for those affected by the 2021 Fraser Valley flooding events to share their experiences in expressive and creative formats. This exhibit honours local farmers while celebrating our astounding human capacity for resilience and collaboration.

Developed by UFV's Dr. Michelle Superle and Sydney Marchand, the Flood Stories project has been supported by the UFV Research Office, Food and Agriculture Institute, College of Arts, English Department, and the Ecodairy. In addition, the Flood Stories team has collaborated with AgSafe BC, the United Way, the City of Abbotsford, the Abbotsford School District, the Yarrow Food Hub, Ecodairy, and the Vancouver School of Narrative Therapy. We are honoured collaborate with the FV Current and Climate Disaster Project by displaying their stories alongside ours in The Reach Gallery Community Arts Space. Aidan Van Delft is curator of this exhibit.

We invite gallery visitors to experience the bittersweet sense of hope offered by the Flood Stories, while also marveling at the extensive collection of interviews, expressive writings, and artistic projects contributed by Abbotsford farmers, Fraser Valley school children from grades K-12, and UFV students, staff, faculty, and alumni. From heartfelt recollections and breathtaking sculptures to captivating visual art and poetry, this project captures the importance of local farmers through artistic celebration.

Most of all, the Flood Stories project highlights our community's extraordinary strength and resilience.

