

paueru gaizette

no.1 july/august 2022

how did we get here?

a zine of the powell street festival advocacy and outreach committee



ROOMS and Double Happiness on Powell

by Angela May

Dear readers,

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the *paueru gaizette*! We know what you're thinking--what in the world is the *paueru gaizette*? Well, look no further. We're gonna tell you!

The *paueru gaizette* is a zine created by a few of us on the Powell Street Festival Advocacy and Outreach Committee. We were looking for a place to share our thoughts, concerns, feelings, questions, and whatever

else--about the place of the Japanese Canadian community in the Downtown Eastside, about the overlaps between and elisions within our two communities, about all the tumult of life and energy and memory and history and growth and love and possibility and all the rest of it that makes us feel stuff about our home(s), about all the things that connect us and seem to mark our difference at the same time. We were looking for a place that was pretty informal, pretty loose. We were also looking for a place that was open to new ideas and really active, stimulating, even funny, or maybe sometimes difficult dialogue. And we couldn't find one--so we made one!

This issue is guided by a theme, expressed in the form of a question: how did we get here? It's a question designed to invite responses that address how we came to create the zine itself, but also how the Japanese Canadian community came to be in Vancouver and the Downtown Eastside--the whole shebang, as it were. So, how did we get here?

...

It's like it says above: I wanted somewhere to put these thoughts, these feelings. I have a bunch of them, and they usually have nowhere to go--nowhere that feels like the right kind of community space, anyway, and certainly nowhere I can write as candidly as I am now. There is a different kind of freedom to be yourself--like, fully yourself--in a zine like this, one of our own making. The freedom also comes from the fact that this zine is dedicated specifically to the entanglements that many of us think about every day and which we just end up talking to each other in circles about. I should say, too, that soooooo much of the inspiration for this zine was the Carnegie Newsletter. It's such a unique and powerful publication--for the community and by the community and, crucially, taking no bullshit! Or trying not to. Always trying to refuse pretense. I feel like I (and probably many of us in the Japanese Canadian community) desperately need that. To be rid of pretense. At least "some" of the time. If there is anything we can learn from the Downtown Eastside community (and there is MUCH we can learn), at least one of the big things is how to live with less pretense. How to just "be". Personally, I love the Downtown Eastside community for its plain old being. So refreshing. It's like community medicine, like breath.

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For a neighborhood that is put under the microscope as much as the DTES is, it really seems like there's a knowledge gap about how all this came about. Often in conversation with those who don't have a direct connection, it seems that the DTES is some sort of eldritch creature. A space between Gastown and Strathcona that flickers in and out of the imagination, devouring light and seeming to leave only empty cans and sickness. Rising out of the mists of a midnight fog, already built, already derelict, already heaving and wheezing. This is simply not true! Like every living thing, our neighborhood developed in continuous conversation between many parties. When we distance ourselves and simplify that story, we remove our own agency to contribute to that conversation and learn. This 'zine is our (yours and my) opportunity to join that conversation. It's really only through listening and talking that we can answer any question as fundamental as "how did we get here?"

...

So, that's what's up with the *paueru gaizette!* Oh--and a huge shoutout to Kyle Yakashiro for coming up with our zine's name--and then being the first person beyond the Advocacy and Outreach Committee to contribute to the zine!

On that note, one more thing: we've made this issue largely drawing on our own creative resources, but we will be welcoming submissions from other community members in the future--from both the Japanese Canadian and Downtown Eastside communities. As soon as we figure out how to do that in a good way, we will spread the word!

- the editors

when does 'for now' mean?

"One, for now."

That was what I had told a resident who had asked me if they could have another wagonwheel treat during the Minori event hosted by the Advocacy and Outreach Committee (AOC) a couple of years ago by Oppenheimer Park. The resident responded to me and asked, "so, *when*

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Oppenheimer Park. The resident responded to me and asked, "so, "when" can I get another?" I didn't know how to respond back. I just stood there--frozen.

Later, I shared this experience with the AOC and was advised that I could have said, "please get in the back of the line and when it is your turn, if there are some left, you can have another."

Reflecting on this experience, I learned that perhaps one way of being helpful was to be precise rather than to be vague. Vagueness, it seemed to me, led to more precarity and a false sense of hope.

As an uninvited visitor to this land and neighborhood, I am an outsider. As a new learner of the history of Japanese Canadians and Paueru-gai, I am an outsider. As an outsider, it is an honour to learn the histories and to witness the lived experiences of those who came to this place before me. When I was asked when 'for now' meant, I was reminded of how every response, every bowl of squash soup, and every wagonwheel mattered. In the future, instead of being vague and frozen, I will endeavor to be more precise and interactive.

Thank you, DTES and AOC, for this learning moment.

- hk



HOW DID WE GET HERE?

M	N	D	L	S	V	I	R	C	U	V	N	Y	C
S	E	M	F	I	I	I	E	O	H	A	N	R	M
O	T	P	H	A	O	L	S	N	I	M	I	I	S
L	N	I	C	I	L	N	I	N	Y	R	A	E	I
I	E	H	F	R	E	I	S	E	T	A	N	M	L
D	M	S	N	S	N	A	T	C	I	C	A	S	A
A	E	D	O	L	C	M	A	T	N	I	G	I	I
R	C	N	L	T	E	U	N	I	U	S	A	S	N
I	A	E	A	I	N	A	C	O	M	M	T	S	O
T	L	I	A	M	Y	R	E	N	M	P	A	A	L
Y	P	R	P	A	D	T	N	N	O	S	K	L	O
S	S	F	I	I	O	I	L	V	C	S	I	C	C
A	I	A	M	S	I	V	I	T	C	A	H	A	N
A	D	R	V	N	D	S	M	O	S	I	S	T	N

DISPLACEMENT
CLASSISM
COMMUNITY
VIOLENCE
RACISM
SHIKATAGANAI
SOLIDARITY
ACTIVISM
RESISTANCE
COLONIALISM
CONNECTION
FRIENDSHIP
TRAUMA

shikata ga nai (仕方がない) means "it cannot be helped" or "nothing can be done about it" and has been used by some Japanese Canadians to express feelings about the state's forced removal, displacement, dispossession, and dispersal of Japanese Canadians during the 1940s and 1950s



Mosaic by Taki Bluesinger (2001)
Photo by Samantha Marsh (2021)

Located @ Powell and Dunlevy and created in 2001, this mosaic commemorates Oppenheimer Park as Paueru Ground (Powell Grounds), the home field of the historic Japanese Canadian baseball team, the Vancouver Asahi. This mosaic is one of 31 mosaics located throughout the Downtown Eastside, each created by different artists, together forming the Footprints Community Art Project (FCAP). The FCAP was run through the Carnegie Street Program (out of the Carnegie Community Centre), under the artistic direction of Marina Stijarto.

Incident Report

Date: April 13, 2021

Location: Hastings x Dunlevy

I'm pushing a heavy cart of fruits and veggies uphill. They'll be going to seniors later. Something is dripping through the cardboard box like usual, but at least it's not raining today. This week the donation is poorly packed and a little wobbly so it's a fight to keep the cart upright. I'm struggling... I feel the pavement under the rubber tire, and I also feel the tire twist.

The cart is slipping, tripping!

falling, tumbling, rolling!

Apples everywhere!

The cart is on its side as the food rolls away, quick!

A man runs over, and gathers apples and potatoes. Holding his shirt out like a bucket. A lady comes over too and begins gathering. We pick up the cart and they help put everything back. Good deeds should be rewarded with good apples, but before I can gather myself they're gone.

Covered over by the screech and shadow of the #20 bus.



paueru gai

On Google maps, the neighbourhood around Vancouver's Oppenheimer Park is labelled as 'Japantown.' An unsuspecting tourist who finds their way there would soon realise the name exists mostly as a reference to the community that once occupied that neighbourhood. Meanwhile, the name that would've been used at the time that the community actually

Lived there, 'Paueru Gai,' is obscured by the English language as Japanese has lost its relevance in the neighbourhood. In a way, this erasure of 'Paueru Gai' and the assertion of 'Japantown' is representative of my experience as a 4th generation Japanese Canadian.

To me, the cultural experience of being Japanese Canadian had always felt like being a part of something that has already ended. There was not much Japanese culture growing up in Abbotsford in the 90s. My family didn't speak Japanese, and I never knew other Asian families or Japanese people. As one of the only males with my Japanese last name, I often wondered if my family's Japanese Canadian heritage was going to truly end with me. In a way, I felt like the unsuspecting tourist visiting 'Japantown,' only to find it already empty.

I came to accept that all family legacies eventually fade. Nothing lasts forever. But as I got older, I was given the opportunity to make ancestral culture more important to my life. When volunteering at Powell Street Festival, I began to realise there were communities of other people with similar cultural experiences to mine. People who come together to celebrate Japanese Canadian arts and culture.

Celebration is an expression of gratitude for this gift of life and the short time that we have together. In my experience, the only people who refer to Paueru Gai as 'Japantown' are those with no stake in the neighbourhood's heritage. Meanwhile, using the name Paueru Gai evokes respect and remembrance for Japanese Canadian heritage, as well as a hopeful look to the future. Paueru Gai is not the grounds the festival takes place on—it is the people who come to celebrate. Reclaiming the name of this neighbourhood is an important declaration of who we are and why we celebrate. Yes, the past is gone, but we are still here.

- Kyle Yakashiro





powell st knows (REMIX)

In 1940, Mark Toyama published a poem in a Japanese Canadian newspaper called *The New Canadian*. The poem is sometimes titled "powell street," sometimes "powell st," and other times, "powell st knows". It was reprinted several times in *The New Canadian* and has been published in other forums, too, including geographer Audrey Kobayashi's popular walking tour book, *Memories of Our Past: A Brief Walking Tour of Powell Street*. In short, Toyama's poem has enjoyed much popularity in the Japanese Canadian community.

Yet, Toyama's poem contains violent language, even including a racial slur. Audrey draws attention to the violence of his words in her book. She notes, for instance, that although in some cases, Toyama's words are "poignant," they are, at other times, "insensitive to issues, such as native rights, that we recognize today when we chart the many injustices that created Powell Street" (10). I suspect that today, Audrey might even update her own language! I imagine she would not say "native rights" - she'd probably talk instead about Indigenous agency and First Nations sovereignty, or something along those lines. Anyway, Audrey is right. About Toyama's poem. His words are sometimes poignant, but they are violent. What is the significance of their poignancy if they are so violent at the same time?

The following poem is my attempt, a few generations later, to intervene in the violence of Toyama's words, while honouring the poignancy that he captured. It's important to recognize that the poem I wrote is a cento poem. The term "cento" comes from the Latin word for

"patchwork": cento poems are poems made of lines from poems written by other poets (shoutout my friend and local poet Erica Isomura for introducing me to cento poems!). So, here, though I have kept some of the spirit and structure of Toyama's poem, I have quite literally replaced his words with words from contemporary Downtown Eastside poets.

powell st knows
of real people in a real neighbourhood
sharing tobacco or spare change
holdin onto each other 4 dear life
At Main & Hastings mainly Hastings, mainly
in these streets
there remains connection
For all our relations
from a familiar place
that's how
powell st knows

powell st knows
all she wants is
kitchens where salads are tossed through waves of sitar and songbirds
she ended up with a black eye
Put your boots on and get ready to march
It can break your heart
powell st knows

powell st knows
Sweat dripping off the walls and chairs
In and out of cracks
west on Hastings, into the early fall morn
under the cherry trees
of Oppenheimer Park
the horror, the anger, the sorrow
powell st knows

powell st knows
what normal is. Smoking cigarettes, fanning my
my hard-earned cash
There is no good feeling here
but recollections, dim as a dust-stricken room

There's stuff here of more significance
Tent city about four hundred
playing with dark thoughts
powell st knows

powell st knows
we need a new map
it's urgent
a thousand crosses in oppenheimer park
dirty, damaged, different
Now filled with love
histories coming to life
I lower my whole body down, crouch my head
aching knees and pounding chest
from the after shock, the affect
drawing out the last long note

A cento poem, composed by Angela May, originally published in *dear community* (a creative video, accessible for free on YouTube: <https://youtube.be/uN9b8A0Xoaw>), and crafted with lines from:

"powell st" by Mark Toyama (*The New Canadian*, 15 May 1940)
"Carnegie" by Tora (*Carnegie Newsletter*, 1 March 1987)
"Song 4 Lou" by Diane Wood (*Carnegie Newsletter*, 1 December 1992)
"At Main & Hastings" by Taum (*Carnegie Newsletter*, 1 February 1998)
"Tirade" by Rupert B. (*Carnegie Newsletter*, 1 August 1998)
"the nest" by S. Millar (*Carnegie Newsletter*, 15 August 1997)
"Memorial Rock at Crab Park" by Fred Arrance (*Carnegie Newsletter* 15 February 1999)
"While Exploring Self-Same" by Leigh Donohue (*Carnegie Newsletter* 15 March 1999)
"Methadone Madness" by R. Loewen (*Carnegie Newsletter*, 1 November 1999)
"Trouble" by Jiang Chang (*Carnegie Newsletter*, 15 January 2000)
"ordinary everyday events" by Judy McGuire (*Carnegie Newsletter*, 15 April 1999)
"The Corridors of Death" by Robyn Livingstone (*Carnegie Newsletter*, 15 March 1999)
"Diamonds" by Daniel Rajala (*Carnegie Newsletter*, 1 February 2000)
"Beer Glasses Tinkling, People Cursing" by Dave McConnell (*Carnegie*

Newsletter, 15 March 1987)

"The Balmoral's Cockroach" by Sheila Baxter (*Carnegie Newsletter*, 1 March 1988)
"A Doorjamb's Edification" by Mike Guy a.k.a. Slacker (*Carnegie Newsletter*, 15 September 2001)
"Savour the Taste" by Phoenix Winter (from *V6A: Writing from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside*, edited by John Mikhail Asfour and Elee Kraljiti Gardiner, Arsenal Pulp Press, 2012)
"A Child's Plea" by Stephen Lytton (from *V6A*).
"16" by Muriel Marjorie (from *V6A*).
"High-track, Low-track" by Antonette Rea (from *V6A*).
"Disposable" by Don Larson (from *V6A*).
"I Might Be Nothing" by Rachel Rose (from *V6A*).
"Trout Lake Park" by Gilles Cyrenne (from *From the Heart of It All: Ten Years of Writing from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside*, edited by Heidi Greco, Otter Press, 2018)
"Renovations" by Cindy McBride (from *From the Heart of It All*)
"Imperfectly Perfect Perfection" Nympha Angeal-Eyes Francis (from *From the Heart of It All*)
"We Need a New Map" by Sandy Cameron (from *Being True to Ourselves: Downtown Eastside Poems of Resistance*, Vancouver Public Library, 2004)
"The Poet's Task" by Claudius Ivan Flandin (*Carnegie Newsletter* 1 November 1986)
"a thousand crosses in oppenheimer park" by Bud Osborn (*Carnegie Newsletter* 1 August 1997)
"Dirty, Damaged, Different" by Jaqueline Angharad Giles (*Carnegie Newsletter*, 15 October 2017)
"We Are The Women of VANDU" by Tracey Morrison (*Carnegie Newsletter*, 1 August 2017)
"SRO front line" by *The Right to Remain* Research Team (self-published, web, 2018)
"The tea flower" by Cathy Lau (from *From the Heart of It All*)
"The Stairs" by Michael Clague (*Carnegie Newsletter*, 1 September 2000)
"re: Morning" by H. Walter (*Carnegie Newsletter*, 1 February 1988)
"chorale cantonese" by Anne Rayvals (*Carnegie Newsletter*, 1 March 1990)

like vines to brick

I was recently asked 'what is the capital A Answer to capital I Injustice?' How can we dismantle it while under the crushing weight of knowing it, of facing it, of feeling it, of participating in it? What is our future and what is our hope of getting there?

The small answer is that we help, we resist, and we hold out our hands to uplift others. We denounce, we critique, we educate, we protest. We negotiate and we fight. But this alone is too complex to be our north star. We need something steady. Firm and unyielding. A BIG, capital A, Answer.

When I was a teen, I was tasked with mowing a large lawn. It was dusty and steep and uneven and just too hot. It seemed never ending. But I was taught that the way to mow a good line was to pick a point on the horizon and push. Push until you reached the end, and when there turn around and push the other way. The advice worked. It took a long time, but in the end, we were satisfied with how clean that miserable field had become.

This has become my BIG answer. The problem of capital I Injustice is insurmountable and untameable. But the only thing needed of us is that we get up every day, set our sights on the horizon, and give it our best push. In a world with systems beyond our capacity and ability, there can only be one thing to do. Do our best. Do our best Kindness, Do our best Goodness, Do our best Justice, Do our best Hope. Do our best Love.

The solution is to keep pushing. Injustice is not a knight that we must challenge, fight, and defeat once and for all. It is a brick wall that we must grow into and eventually through. We grow into every crack, every opportunity, every purchase. Sometimes we will grow inside. Sometimes we will grow next to. Sometimes we will grow on top of or underneath. And sometimes,

very rarely,

very softly,

A brick will pop out from the force of the vines onto the ground. And the brick will loudly protest of course. But the vines will be silent. And the wall will be silent. And the long multitude of other bricks will be silent. Because all parts had reached an undeniable agreement:

That injustice was no longer necessary to the system.

Like vines to brick, let's take every opportunity to do our best.

- Caleb Nakasaki



The ground remembers
More than Powell, more than me
A reckoning comes

- Tsuyu

King Rooms by Kathy Shimizu

In Memory of Kevin Sleziak

(May 28, 1966 - October 24, 2021)

Kevin was a long-time, dedicated Powell Street Festival volunteer. He taught us so much.



In addition to volunteering at Powell Street Festival, Kevin was a dedicated volunteer of Hives for Humanity. He worked closely with honeybees!

As the Hives for Humanity website puts it, "the bees, buzzing, fragrant and unique, are a way into community."

Bee for Kevin by Kathy Shimizu

It was last year, on Sunday, October 24th, 2021, that Kevin passed away, in the comfort and care of May's Place. And it was last year, on Sunday, November 28th, 2021, that we gathered to honour and remember Kevin, in Oppenheimer Park. Yet, his memory is still with us.

This year, on Saturday, July 30th and Sunday, July 31st, we will once again gather in Oppenheimer Park, for the 46th Annual Powell Street Festival. Preparing for the festival and returning to the park prompts us to reflect on the warmth and the many teachings that Kevin shared with us.

At the core of our reflections is one central idea, which is all about how to return to Oppenheimer Park in a good way:

People have had different experiences, come from different backgrounds, and encounter different daily challenges. Returning to Oppenheimer Park in a good way means respecting those experiences, backgrounds, and challenges.

Though many of us in the Japanese Canadian community can trace our ancestors' homes back to the historic Powell Street neighbourhood, for most of us, it has been years (if not decades) since we have "really" spent time in Powell or the Downtown Eastside. Even though this disconnection is a result of the governments' (federal, provincial, and municipal) racist policies and violent actions, and even though this history teaches us about the legacies of displacement, there is one legacy of displacement that can be particularly difficult to reckon with: we simply don't know our historic home like we used to.

This is a big part of why Kevin's warmth, welcome, and teachings--which is to say nothing of his 20+ years of volunteering for Powell Street Festival--were so crucial and so loving. Kevin recognized the importance of our community's memory of Powell; and he helped us get to know the neighbourhood, to return in a good way.

Powell Street is the historic home of Japanese Canadians, yes--but it is also the current home of Downtown Eastside residents. What we learned from Kevin is how to be a good neighbour, how to remember our historic home while respecting the fact that this is also so many people's current home.

"This is my neighbourhood. Yes, it's the Downtown Eastside [...] There are problems with poverty, drug addiction, mental illness, and homelessness [...] but I lived in the Downtown Eastside for 32 years, and I never want to leave. This is my home, and I love it."

- Kevin Sleziak, *The Spirit of Nihonmachi* (director: Greg Masuda)

The best way to honour Kevin is to make every effort to continue to put his teachings into practice.

Here's to solidarity, to community power, and to you, Kevin!

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